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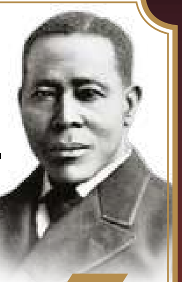
ALL ABOUT HISTORY



HERO OF EMANCIPATION

How William Still led the enslaved to freedom

GREAT GIFTS OF HISTORY RATED

YETI HUNTERS

100-year quest for this mythical beast

HISTORY OF SANTA

Uncover eight centuries of festive folklore, from the Yule Lads to the Christmas Goat

MEDITERRANEAN'S LOST SUPERPOWER

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FUTURE
ISSUE 137

HEROES OF THE WWII HOME FRONT

Men and women who answered their nation's call

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SCAN TO GET OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Depictions of Santa have evolved massively over the centuries

Welcome

There's a common refrain in my family ahead of the Christmas festivities saying "we haven't gone mad this year." Of course, yes we have. More food than is really necessary (it will get eaten though), probably more gifts than anyone actually asked for and generally a lot of effort made. Ultimately, the effort is part of the fun for me. I feel like I should say much the same about this issue of **All About History**; we haven't gone mad this year. But there is a strong festive theme, to be sure. We lead, of course, with our history of Santa, which is a fascinating tale whether you have much invested in Christmas personally or not. The evolution of this universally recognised folk figure is quite remarkable, from saint to miraculous gift-giver. We take a look at the different incarnations of Father Christmas, with some of the most interesting international variants and the related sidekicks and creatures too.

Plus we rank some of history's most famous gifts, go hunting for the Yeti and our seasonal gift guide is back too (some more practical inspiration for presents can be found there). Plus we learn about the Borgia's poison princess, how William Still freed enslaved people on the Underground Railroad, and much more. So, happy holidays to all and I hope you enjoy the issue.

Jonathan Gordon
Editor

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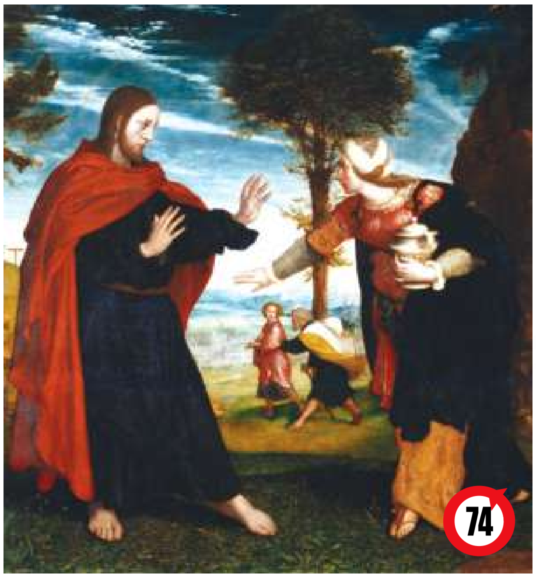

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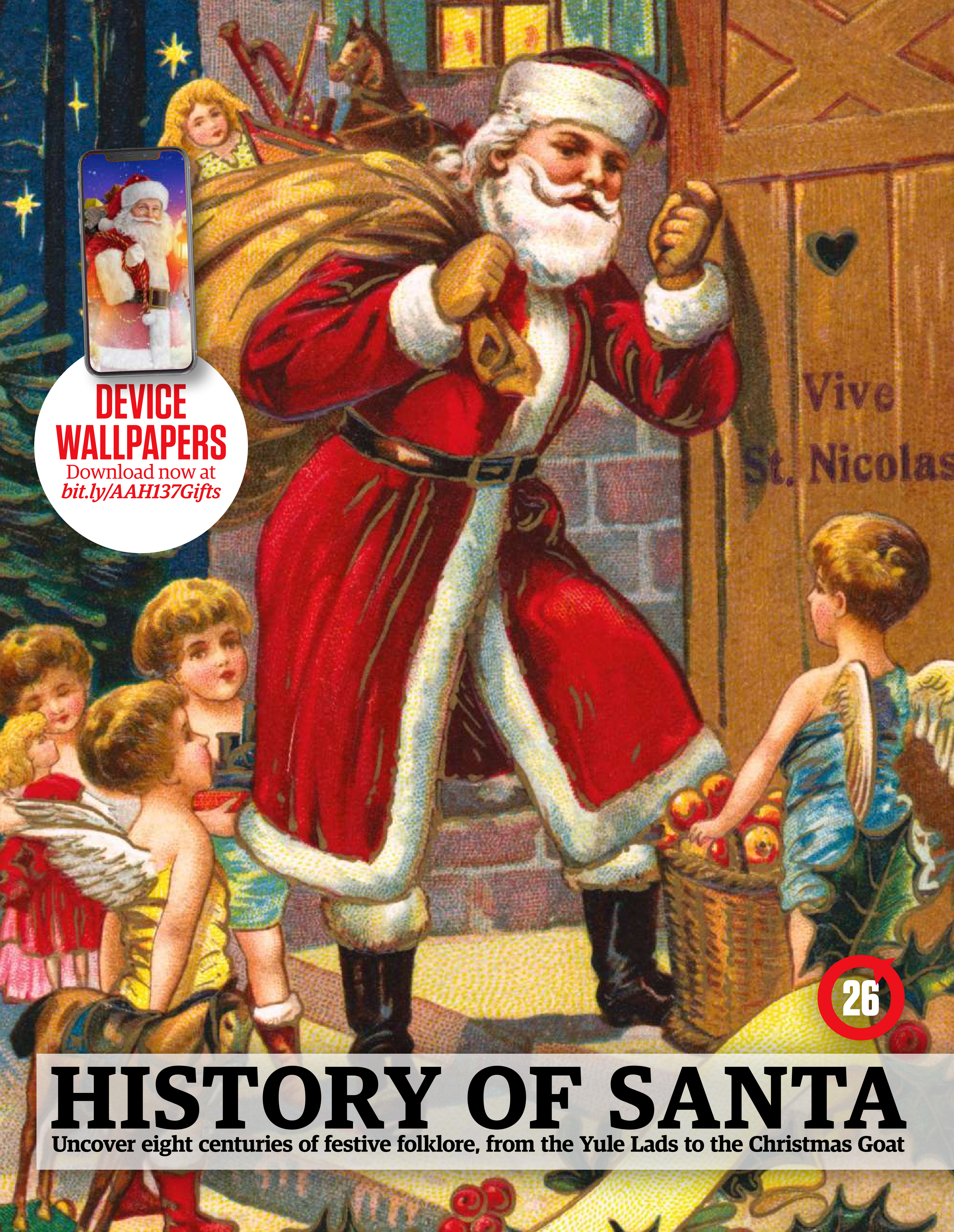

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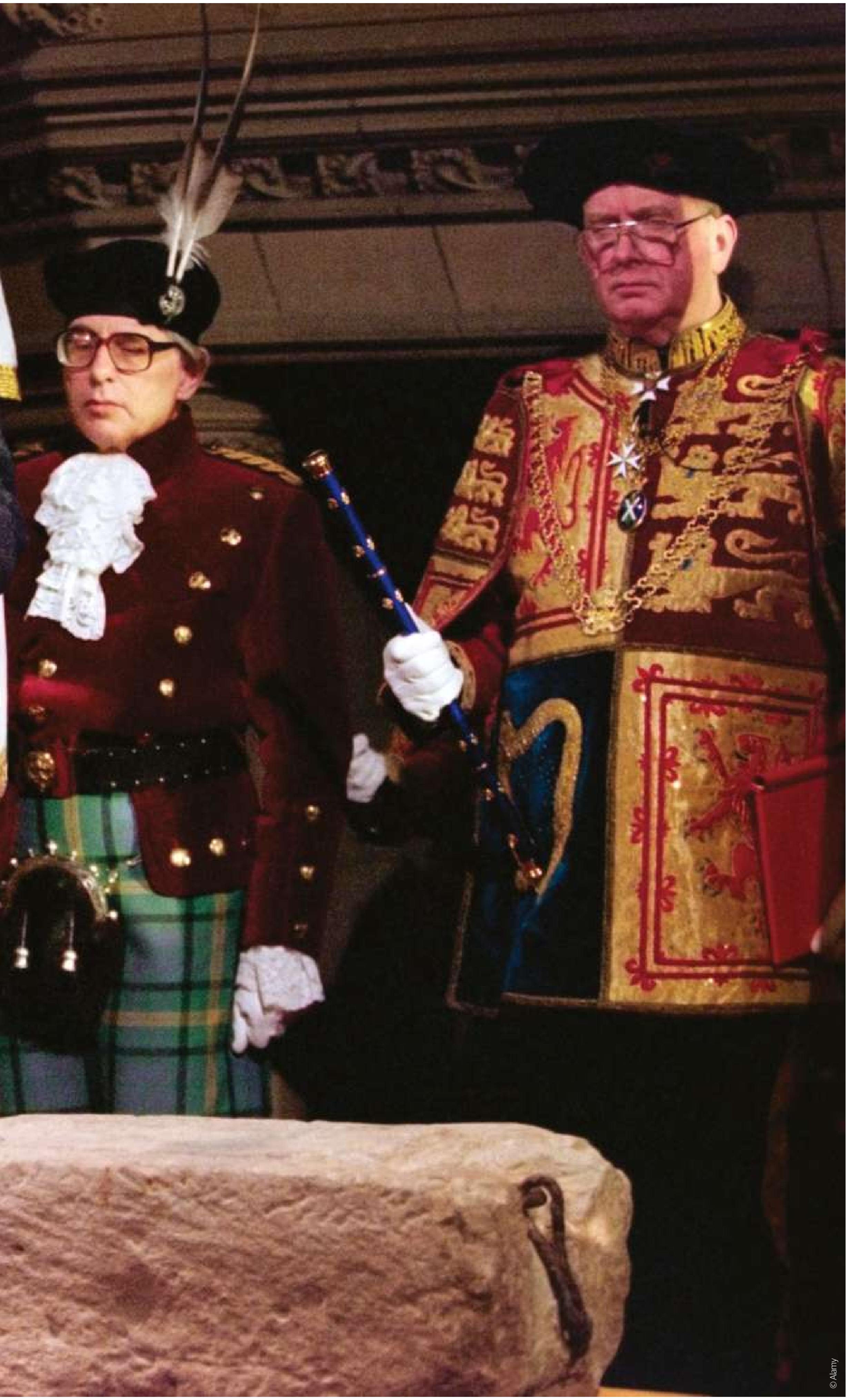
HISTORY OF SANTA

Uncover eight centuries of festive folklore, from the Yule Lads to the Christmas Goat

Defining Moments



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30 November 1996

STONE OF SCONE RETURNED

The Stone of Scone, a ceremonial and historical sandstone block, was finally taken back to its home in Scotland after it had been stolen by the forces of King Edward I of England in 1296. Also known as the Stone of Destiny, the Stone of Scone had been used in the coronations of Scottish monarchs, and after its theft in the crowning of English and then British monarchs. Its return to Edinburgh in 1996 took place 700 years after it was taken.

© Alamy

1 December 1955

ROSA PARKS REFUSES TO MOVE

On her way home from work on a racially segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat for white passengers as the bus started to fill up and the number of 'coloured' seats were reduced. She was arrested as a result. Though she was not the first person to have participated in a bus sit-in, Parks' protest sparked the beginning of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a key moment in the American civil rights movement.

Winter Savings

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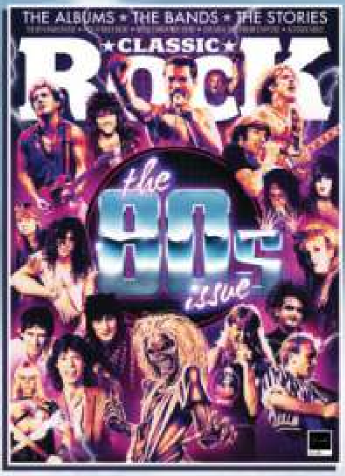

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ALL ABOUT

THE ALLIED HOME FRONT

Discover how the nations of the Allies during WWII set about protecting and mobilising their people for the battles to come

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THE GLOBAL HOME FRONT

Main image: © Getty Images

Written by Emily Staniforth, Callum McKelvie

Key Events

1.5 million people were relocated during the first three days of evacuation alone.

SEPT 1939 FIRST CHILDREN EVACUATED

Due to the fear of air attack and even invasion, British children are evacuated from the cities and into rural areas. The first evacuation was carried out two days before the declaration of war.

RATION BOOK
RATION BOOK

JAN 1940 FOOD RATIONING INTRODUCED

The British government introduces rationing to help combat the national food shortage. Every member of the British public is given a ration book with coupons necessary to purchase the rationed items. These include: bacon, butter, meat, sugar, lard, tea and more.

FIRST ANDERSON SHELTERS BUILT FEB 1939

Named after Sir John Anderson, who was in charge of Air Raid precautions, the first garden shelter designed for air raids is built. By the war's end over 3.5 million had been distributed.

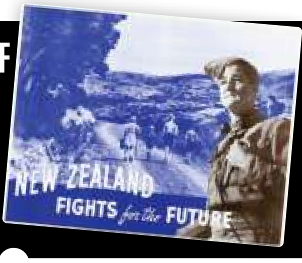
BRITAIN DECLARES WAR SEPT 1939

At 11.15am on 3 September 1939, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announces to the British public that they are now at war. Australia, France and New Zealand quickly follow.

BRITAIN DECLARES WAR

NEW ZEALAND BRACES ITSELF FOR INVASION 1942

New Zealand begins to prepare for a possible attempt at invasion by the Japanese. However, all fears are abated following the American victory at the Battle of Midway.



SEPT 1939 · JAN 1940 · MAY 1940 · SEPT 1940 · DEC 1941 · 1942

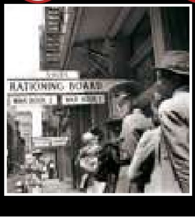
CANADA ESTABLISHES THE WARTIME PRICES AND TRADE BOARD SEPT 1939

In order to monitor inflation, the Canadian government creates the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. This body introduced a freeze on wages and the prices of goods and services.

AIR RAID SHELTER

FIRST COMMUNAL AIR RAID SHELTERS BUILT MAR 1940

As the threat of bombing increases, communal air raid shelters are constructed in Britain. However, rumours that they are unsafe make them unpopular.



RATIONING INTRODUCED (UNITED STATES) JAN 1942

The United States government introduces rationing, beginning with rubber tyres. By May the government begins rationing food items, starting with sugar.

MAY 1940 HOME GUARD CREATED

As concern grows surrounding a possible German invasion, the Home Guard is created. Comprising men unfit for conscription, either through age or means, it becomes a highly organised fighting force, designed to defend British shores from German attack.

Despite what *Dad's Army* tells us, the Home Guard was dangerous and over 1,200 members died during the war.

SEPT 1940 THE BLITZ

The Luftwaffe begins a sustained bombing campaign that lasts until May 1941. The bombing primarily targets London, but other cities and towns deemed to have strategic importance to the war effort are targeted. 43,500 civilians are killed by the time the Blitz end.

DEC 1941

PEARL HARBOR

On the morning of 7 December in 1941, the Japanese air force launches a surprise attack on the US air force base of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The attack ends the US debate over involvement in the conflict.

America declared war the day after Pearl Harbor.

BRACERO PROGRAMS BEGIN AUG 1942

In order to combat the shortage of labour in America's agricultural industries, the Bracero Programs are agreed with Mexico, allowing men to work in the US on short-term contracts.

BEVIN BOYS ESTABLISHED DEC 1943

Concerned about the shortage of coal, the British government conscripts young men to work in the coal mines. Known as the Bevin Boys after Minister for Labour and National Service, Ernest Bevin.

FIRST V WEAPON ATTACK ON LONDON JUNE 1944

On 13 June, not long after the Normandy landings, London suffers its first V-weapon attacks. In September, V2 weapons are launched, with nearly 1,400 striking London by the war's end.

VE DAY MAY 1945

Germany surrenders, ending the war in Europe. Crowds of people fill the streets of the UK and celebrate the end of nearly six years of conflict in Europe.

ONLY DEATHS ON US SOIL AS A RESULT OF ENEMY ACTION MAY 1945

A Japanese fire balloon bomb detonates, killing Archie Mitchell's pregnant wife and five children – the only deaths on US soil as a result of action by an enemy power.

BRITISH GENERAL ELECTION JULY 1945

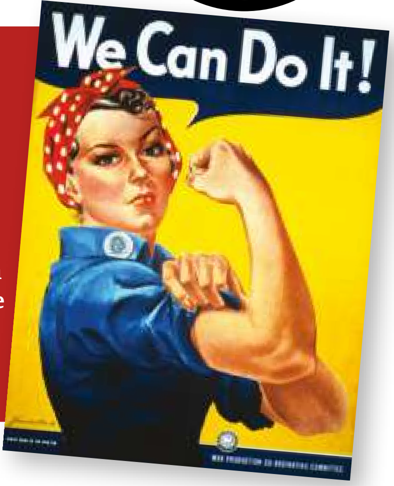
One short month before VJ day, Britain holds a general election, the first since the beginning of the war. PM Winston Churchill is ousted after a landslide victory for Clement Attlee's Labour Party.

AUG 1945

1942

ROSIE THE RIVETER CAMPAIGN

The US government launches their famous 'Rosie the Riveter' propaganda campaign. Intended to persuade women to work in munitions factories, the campaign was highly successful and became a cultural icon. In 1943 she even became the subject of a popular song named after her.



AUG 1945

VICTORY OVER JAPAN DAY

Following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, America celebrates victory over Japan and a final end to the conflict. In New York, Times Square is filled with people as parades are organised and ticker tape rains down onto the celebrating crowds.

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

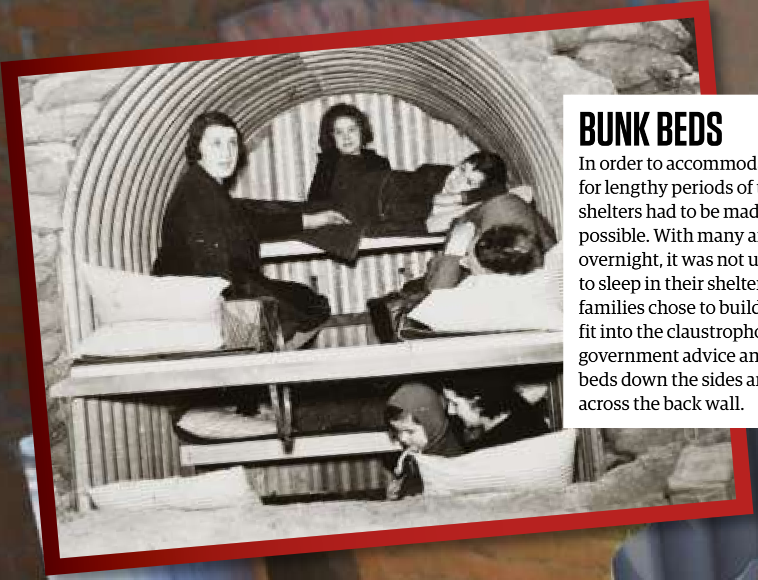
ANDERSON SHELTER

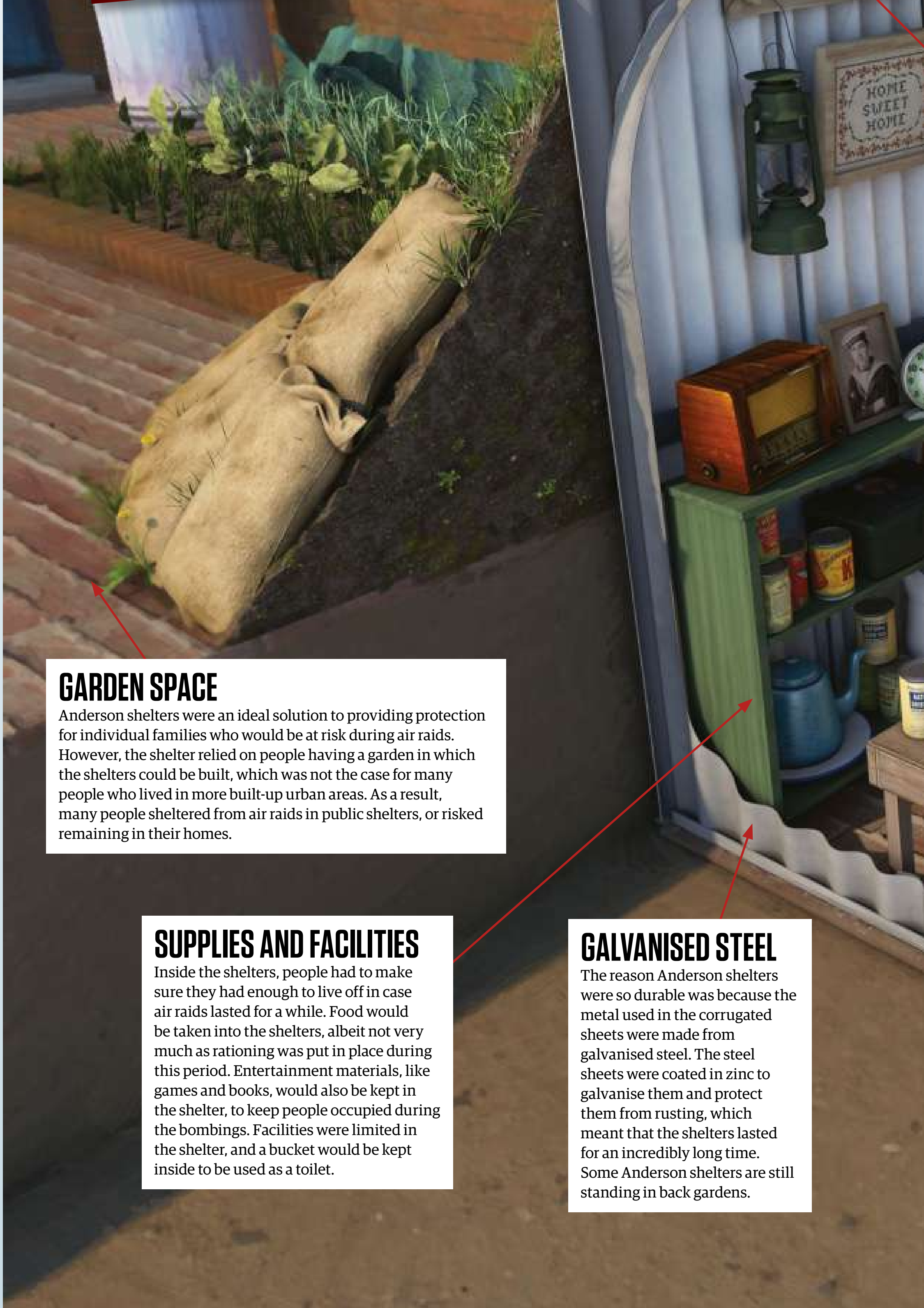
Britain
1938-1945

One of the most iconic structures of the British World War II home front was the Anderson shelter, a rounded metal construction that was built in the back gardens of homes to protect British citizens from Luftwaffe bombings. These shelters could be built by ordinary people and served individual families, unlike the bigger public shelters that could house many more people. The Anderson shelter was first designed in 1938 by engineers William Paterson and Oscar Carl Kerrison, who named their creation after Sir John Anderson, the Minister of Home Security who commissioned the design. From February 1939 until the outbreak of war in September of the same year, over a million Anderson shelters were built in gardens across Britain. While some households received their shelters for free from the government, families who earned more than £250 a year (equivalent to around £15,000 in today's money) had to pay for their shelters.

Anderson shelters measured around 1.95m by 1.35m and could fit up to six people inside, making them ideal for families who had the space and garden to accommodate one. They were the most widely used type of home shelter, with an estimated 2.5 million shelters being built in gardens by the middle of 1940. However, for those without a garden and the space, the Anderson shelter was not so accessible. Other kinds of shelter were developed, including the Morrison shelter, which could be erected inside the house to provide protection from bombing. Another popular option though were public shelters, and in London many people chose to shelter in the city's underground stations when they heard an air raid siren.

Ultimately, the Anderson shelters saved thousands of lives during the intense bombings experienced by Britain during World War II. They were strong and shielded people from nearby explosions, with some still surviving to this day.





BUNK BEDS

In order to accommodate up to six people for lengthy periods of time, the Anderson shelters had to be made as comfortable as possible. With many air raids happening overnight, it was not uncommon for people to sleep in their shelters. Therefore, many families chose to build bunk beds that could fit into the claustrophobic shelters, following government advice and placing the adult beds down the sides and children's beds across the back wall.

GARDEN SPACE

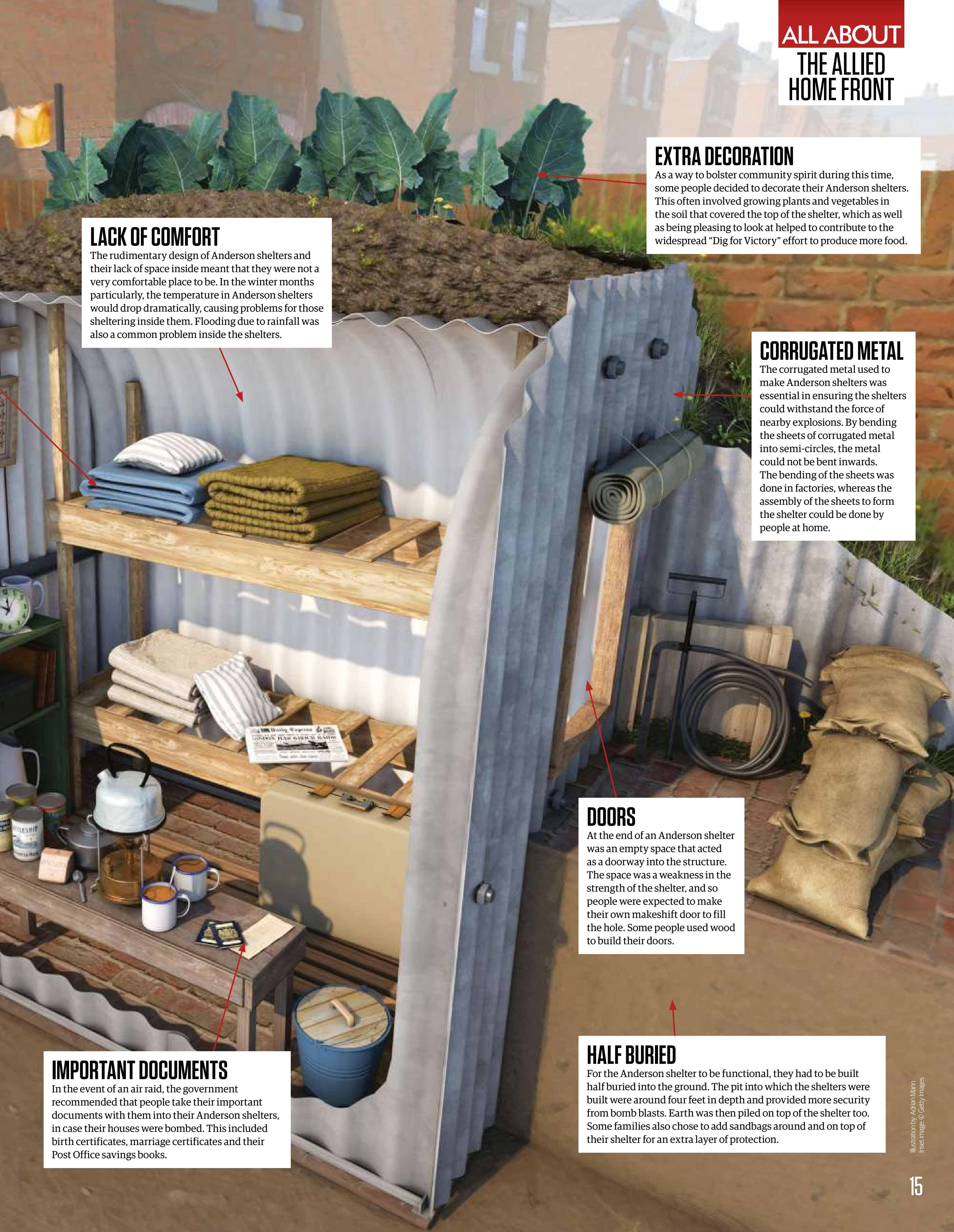
Anderson shelters were an ideal solution to providing protection for individual families who would be at risk during air raids. However, the shelter relied on people having a garden in which the shelters could be built, which was not the case for many people who lived in more built-up urban areas. As a result, many people sheltered from air raids in public shelters, or risked remaining in their homes.

SUPPLIES AND FACILITIES

Inside the shelters, people had to make sure they had enough to live off in case air raids lasted for a while. Food would be taken into the shelters, albeit not very much as rationing was put in place during this period. Entertainment materials, like games and books, would also be kept in the shelter, to keep people occupied during the bombings. Facilities were limited in the shelter, and a bucket would be kept inside to be used as a toilet.

GALVANISED STEEL

The reason Anderson shelters were so durable was because the metal used in the corrugated sheets were made from galvanised steel. The steel sheets were coated in zinc to galvanise them and protect them from rusting, which meant that the shelters lasted for an incredibly long time. Some Anderson shelters are still standing in back gardens.



EXTRA DECORATION

As a way to bolster community spirit during this time, some people decided to decorate their Anderson shelters. This often involved growing plants and vegetables in the soil that covered the top of the shelter, which as well as being pleasing to look at helped to contribute to the widespread "Dig for Victory" effort to produce more food.

LACK OF COMFORT

The rudimentary design of Anderson shelters and their lack of space inside meant that they were not a very comfortable place to be. In the winter months particularly, the temperature in Anderson shelters would drop dramatically, causing problems for those sheltering inside them. Flooding due to rainfall was also a common problem inside the shelters.

CORRUGATED METAL

The corrugated metal used to make Anderson shelters was essential in ensuring the shelters could withstand the force of nearby explosions. By bending the sheets of corrugated metal into semi-circles, the metal could not be bent inwards. The bending of the sheets was done in factories, whereas the assembly of the sheets to form the shelter could be done by people at home.

DOORS

At the end of an Anderson shelter was an empty space that acted as a doorway into the structure. The space was a weakness in the strength of the shelter, and so people were expected to make their own makeshift door to fill the hole. Some people used wood to build their doors.

IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

In the event of an air raid, the government recommended that people take their important documents with them into their Anderson shelters, in case their houses were bombed. This included birth certificates, marriage certificates and their Post Office savings books.

HALF BURIED

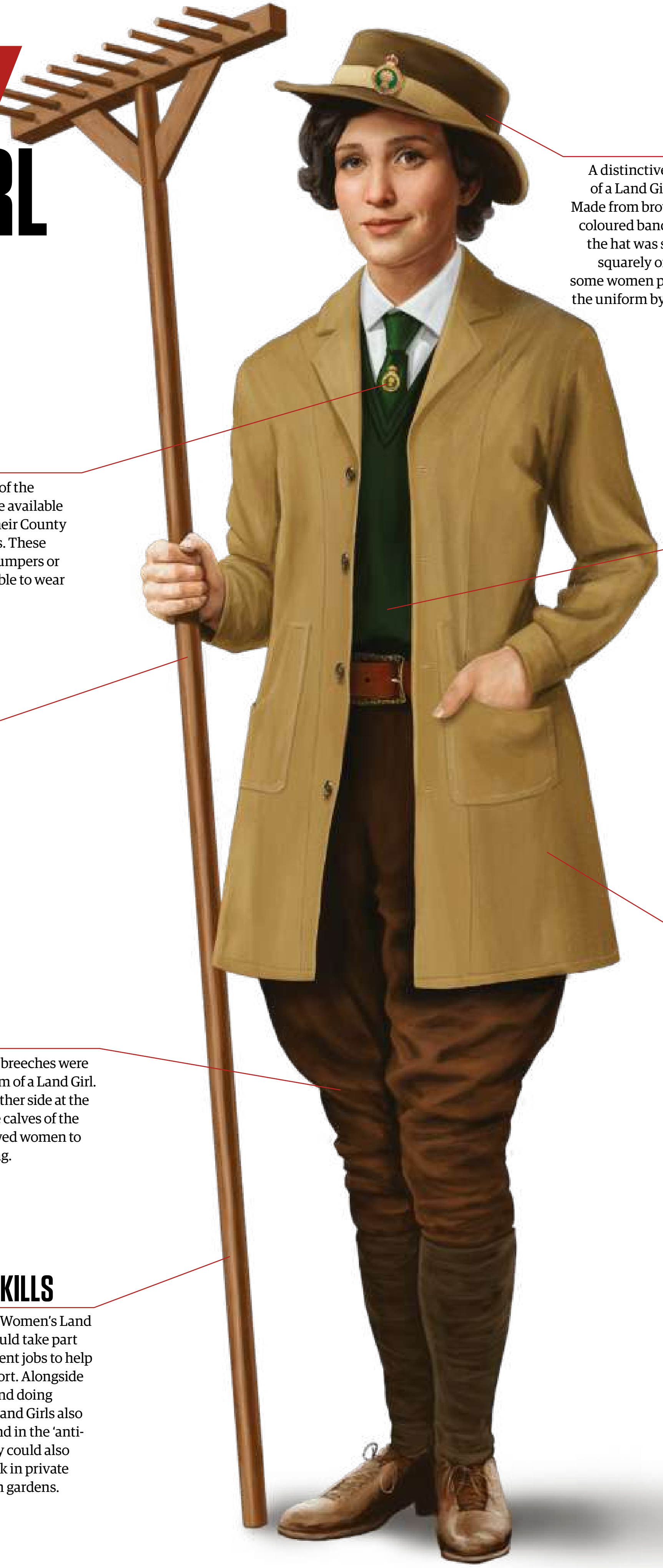
For the Anderson shelter to be functional, they had to be built half buried into the ground. The pit into which the shelters were built were around four feet in depth and provided more security from bomb blasts. Earth was then piled on top of the shelter too. Some families also chose to add sandbags around and on top of their shelter for an extra layer of protection.

Illustration by: Adrian Mann
Inset image: © Getty Images

Anatomy

LAND GIRL

Britain
1939-1945



HATS

A distinctive part of the uniform of a Land Girl was the headwear. Made from brown felt with a khaki-coloured band wrapped around it, the hat was supposed to be worn squarely on the head. However some women put their own spin on the uniform by wearing the hat at a jaunty angle.

BADGES

Depicting a wheat sheaf, the logo of the Women's Land Army, badges were available for Land Girls to purchase from their County Office and wear on their uniforms. These were commonly pinned to their jumpers or hats, with special pins also available to wear on their ties.

GREEN JUMPER

Arguably the most iconic aspect of a Land Girls uniform was the green jumper they wore. Helping to keep them warm as they worked outside for most of the year, the jumper was worn layered over a white shirt and a green tie.

WOMEN'S LAND ARMY

Originally founded during World War I, the Women's Land Army (WLA) was re-established in June 1939 to provide food for Britain as it prepared for war. Women began to volunteer to work as Land Girls for the WLA, but from the end of 1941, they could be conscripted to join the agricultural organisation.

OVERCOAT

The overcoats issued as part of the uniform were khaki or light brown in colour and were adorned with Women's Land Army titles on the shoulder epaulettes. The coats were fastened with several plastic buttons and had deep pockets on either side.

BREECHES

Two pairs of brown corduroy breeches were supplied as part of the uniform of a Land Girl. They could be buttoned on either side at the top, and were tied around the calves of the legs with lace. Breeches allowed women to move with ease while working.

DIFFERENT SKILLS

As a member of the Women's Land Army, Land Girls could take part in a variety of different jobs to help towards the war effort. Alongside working on farms and doing agricultural work, Land Girls also worked in dairies and in the 'anti-vermin squad'. They could also be employed to work in private houses with kitchen gardens.

Illustration by: Kevin McGivern

Historical Treasures

RATION BOOK

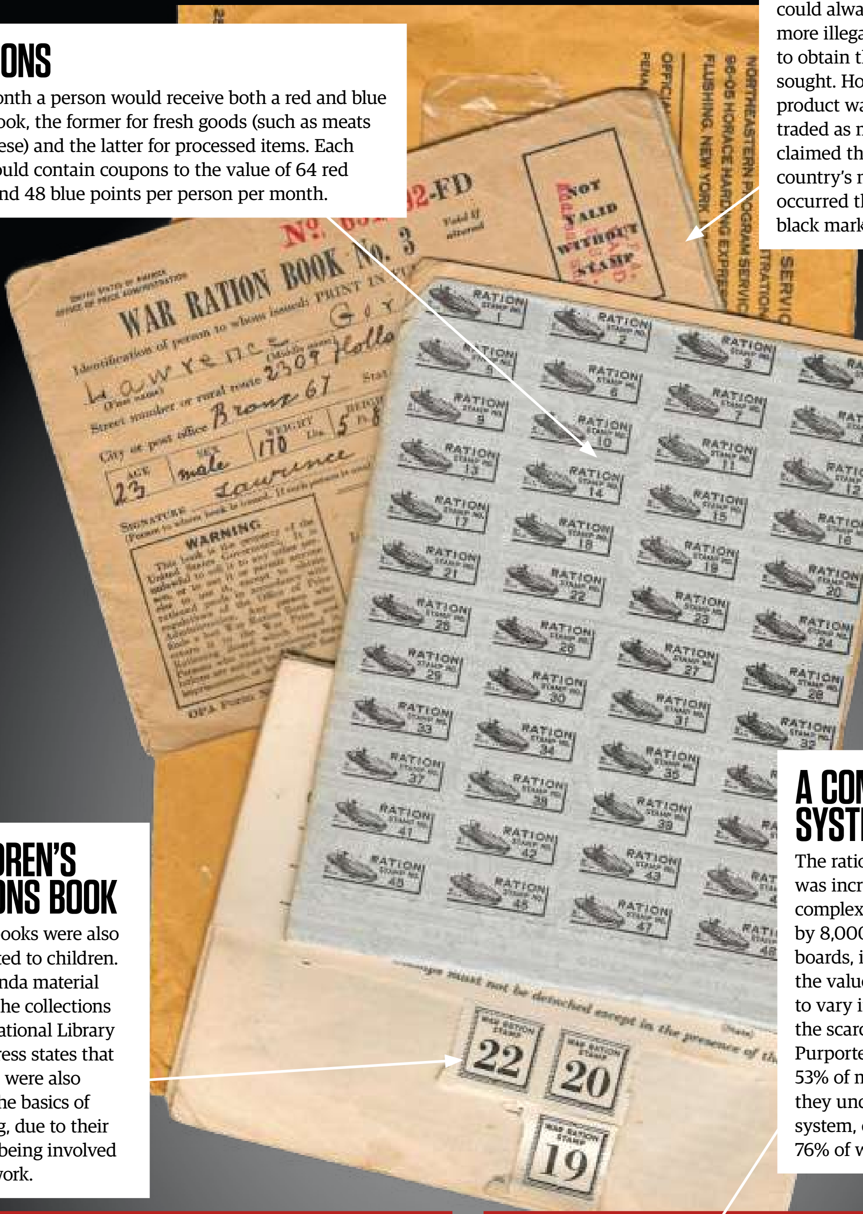
Vital to the war effort, these coupon books helped control the food supply of the United States

United States, 1942

As food and other supplies became scarce, rationing became just another part of everyday life during World War II. In Britain, though petrol was rationed in 1939, it was introduced widespread across a variety of items in 1940. During World War I, although nations such as Germany and Britain experienced food shortages and rationing, the United States was able to rely solely on the implementation of a propaganda scheme designed to cut food waste. But during World War II, the population of the US were not so lucky and it quickly became apparent that certain items, particularly those deemed valuable to the war effort, would need to be rationed. Rationing began in 1942 and was organised by the Federal Office of Price Administration, known as OPA for short.

Every citizen of the United States (man, woman and child) received a ration book, which contained a number of stamps, worth points, which were used (along with cash of course) to purchase scarce items. According to the University of Delaware, some 180 million ration books were printed though only 123 million were issued. As the initial purpose of the books was to ration only sugar, 8 million households who were found to hold excessive stocks of sugar had their ration books withheld. Sugar rationing was limited to eight ounces of sugar per household per week. The first issued ration book would provide enough stamps for a family to obtain a 56-week supply of sugar. Families were required to report how much sugar they had in stock, in order to discourage hoarding.

The rationing system was complex and only became more so as it developed. As the war continued, other items were included and a new system of red and blue books was created. This saw canned fish, meats, cheese, margarine, fats and butter added. In all, rationed items included such things as fuel, paraffin and even typewriters, primarily due to the importance of these items to the ongoing war effort. Laws surrounding rationing were strict as illicit (or black market) trading was common.



COUPONS

Each month a person would receive both a red and blue ration book, the former for fresh goods (such as meats and cheese) and the latter for processed items. Each book would contain coupons to the value of 64 red points and 48 blue points per person per month.

THE BLACK MARKET

Of course if you ran out of stamps, you could always turn to more illegal methods to obtain the items you sought. However, no product was as illicitly traded as meat. The OPA claimed that 17% of the country's meat trade occurred through the black market.

CHILDREN'S RATIONS BOOK

Ration books were also distributed to children. Propaganda material held in the collections of the National Library of Congress states that children were also taught the basics of rationing, due to their parents being involved in war work.

A COMPLEX SYSTEM

The rationing system was incredibly complex. Managed by 8,000 ration boards, it allowed the value of points to vary in relation to the scarcity of items. Purportedly only 53% of men stated they understood the system, compared to 76% of women.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

HOME FRONT HEROES

Ten extraordinary people who – through acts big and small – contributed to the ongoing war effort

GEORGE ARTHUR ROBERTS

TRINIDADIAN, 1 AUG 1891 – 8 JAN 1970

George Arthur Roberts arrived in Britain and joined the army around 1914, fighting in World War I. In the years between the two wars, Roberts became a founding member of the League of Coloured Peoples, an influential civil rights organisation. In 1938 he joined the Auxiliary Fire Service (the first black man to do so) and throughout World War II he bravely tackled the fires of the Blitz. In 1943 George was made the leading fireman and in 1944 received the British Empire Medal.

Lieutenant Ernest Gidden

British, 15 March 1910 – 20 Dec 1961

Although a member of the armed forces, Ernest Gidden was in London when he carried out the act of bravery that earned him the George Cross. During the war the German Air Force dropped parachute mines, highly explosive devices, over London. On the morning of 17 April 1941 Lieutenant Ernest Gidden received word from his superior that one of these devices had fallen on Hungerford Bridge in London and fused itself to the main railway line. He gently manoeuvred the device so that the mechanism was facing him and managed to move it to a safe position so that it could be deactivated.

Ernest Gidden received not only the George Cross, but also a George Medal and an OBE.

Elizabeth Anne Everitt's four-year-old son Anthony, who was presented with her posthumous award for bravery

Elizabeth Anne Everitt

British, 27 Nov 1904 – 27 May 1944

In 1944, Elizabeth Anne Everitt was a recently widowed single mother, living in Saffron Walden, Essex. On the night of 27 May, a bomber took off from the US Air Force base at Little Walden, but quickly ran into trouble. The plane crashed into a field near Everitt's home and she ran out, desperately attempting to rescue the crew from the craft as it burst into flames. However, unbeknownst to Everitt, the aircraft was loaded with bombs and as she tried to rescue the crew two of them detonated, killing her. Everitt's bravery was posthumously recognised and her four-year-old son Anthony was presented with her award.

BETTY MCINTOSH

AMERICAN, 1 MARCH 1915 – 8 JUNE 2015

In 1943, Betty McIntosh was a successful journalist. However, she soon found herself hired, along with a slew of other journalists and media professionals, by the OSS - the Office of Strategic Services. This secret organisation was the United States espionage arm during World War II, and Betty was employed to spread 'black propaganda' - disinformation aimed to impact the morale of Japanese troops. From within the United States, Betty and her compatriots carried out vital war work.

George Walters

American, 1903 – 1999

George Walters was working as a crane operator at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked. High up in his cabin, he watched the carnage unfold and attempted to manoeuvre his crane to try and shield the USS Pennsylvania, a sitting duck below. As the attack continued, Walters remained in his cabin the entire time, using the crane to both protect the ships and workers below, but also to signal where the planes were and assist the crews in shooting them down. Eventually, his crane was hit and he was rendered unconscious by the blast, yet managed to survive.

Pearl Harbor the morning of the Japanese attack, George Walters' crane can be seen in the background

Some stories even state that George attempted to use his crane to physically batter the planes out of the sky.

MAE KRIER

AMERICAN, 21 MARCH 1926 – PRESENT

Mae Krier was one of many 'Rosie the Riveters' after the famous WWII American propaganda campaign depicting the titular Rosie with a red scarf around her head and clad in blue overalls, baring her muscles. The campaign was to induce women to work in factories to support the war effort and for two years between 1943 and 1945, Krier worked as one of many such women. In her later years Krier campaigned for a national day in recognition of the work of the 'Rosies'. 21 March was designated 'Rosie The Riveter Day' and Krier also received a congressional medal.

Elsie MacGill

Canadian, 27 March 1905 – 4 Nov 1980

Known as "Queen of the Hurricanes", Elsie MacGill was one of the first female aircraft designers. During the war she became famous for supervising the production of 1,450 Hawker Hurricane fighter planes. MacGill worked tirelessly to redesign the car plant where she worked and also ensured that the staff were adequately retrained. Her wartime contributions saw her become something of a celebrity and role model. She was even the heroine of an issue of the American comic book, *True Comics*, that told of her accomplishments.

During the Battle of Britain, Hawker Hurricanes were responsible for half of the enemy planes destroyed - more than the Spitfire.

RAYMOND HAWLEY

BRITISH, C.1929 – UNKNOWN

One terrifying night during the Blitz, a bomb fell through the roof of 11-year-old Raymond Hawley's home. At the time Raymond was sheltering with his disabled mother and four siblings. Rather than be frozen with fright, the young boy quickly leapt into action. Grabbing a pair of trousers, he smothered the explosive device and ran quickly down the stairs and hurled the bomb into the garden. The young Raymond received an award for Gallantry for his actions.

LILLIAN HALLE

BRITISH, C.1846 – UNKNOWN

Lillian Halle (purportedly a "tiny, frail-looking woman") was 95 when in 1941 a bomb hit her home at Chesterton Road, in Kensington, London according to the National Archives. As her home caught fire, Halle began tearing the burning wallpaper off of her walls. Miraculously, her plan worked and she saved her home. Halle had certainly lived life to the full too, having travelled around the world three times and crossed the Atlantic 16 times in her adventures.

ALBERT ERNEST DOLPHIN

BRITISH, 15 JAN 1896 – 7 SEP 1940

Albert Ernest Dolphin was a hospital porter who had spent 20 years of his life working at the South Eastern Hospital at New Cross, South London. On the night of 7 September he was attending to his duties when a bomb landed on the building. One nurse in particular was trapped under a pile of rubble and Dolphin and others attempted to free her. Suddenly one of the walls began to give way. In order to save her, Dolphin threw himself over her, protecting her but sacrificing his own life in the process.

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

THE GLOBAL HOME FRONT

Professor Ashley Jackson explains how Britain's imperial colonies had their unique experiences of WWII

At the time of World War II, Britain still had a large empire, can these countries be said to have had 'home fronts' of their own?
Absolutely. The 'home front' is a reified cultural presence in Britain; to ensure the kind of capture of the war's imperial dimensions that our national history needs, we should extend the concept across the Empire. For example, when we think of the Blitz here in Britain, we might simultaneously think of the destruction visited upon Malta, the decimation of Rangoon, the bombing (by both sides) of British Pacific islands or Singapore, and the enormous civil defence efforts in India, blackout, ARP tin hats, stirrup pumps, and all. We can do this with all sorts of familiar British home front themes - contemplating the rationing that extended across the entire empire, the food demonstration vans helping people adjust to new staples in Kenya or Mauritius, the shortages of non-essential (and sometimes essential) goods. Similarly, the colonial home front featured the regimentation of life, as military service and civilian defence work, hospital work, charitable work for war causes, military construction work and the like affected every territory, along with the presence of armed forces, friend and foe, including in some territories American GIs and airmen, with their money and largesse. Urbanisation was spurred by war. Inflation, 'dig for victory' and 'careless talk costs lives' style initiatives and information campaigns, posters, newspapers, and radio propaganda - they were all highly significant on the home front in every British overseas territory. The war touched everything.

Ashley Jackson is a professor of military and imperial history at King's College London. He is the author of *The British Empire And The Second World War* (Continuum/Bloomsbury, 2006) and *Ceylon At War, 1939-1945* (Helion, 2018), among numerous other publications.

How did the conditions in these overseas territories differ from those of the UK? Did they experience rationing for example, or air raids?
There were similarities - rationing, inflation, cost of living increases, people in uniform on the streets, recruitment

Headshot photo courtesy of: Ashley Jackson

ABOVE
During the war, the Bengal province suffered from famine

BELOW-LEFT
Winston Churchill visits Malta; earlier in the war, the island had been under siege

BELOW-RIGHT
Rangoon, Burma suffered intense bombing campaigns during the war

for civil and military work even in rural areas. There were evacuations from bomb or bombardment-threatened areas. Gibraltar's civilian population was moved out; India faced the horror of famine; and Pacific islands were devastated by intense combat and bombing from both sides, spawning all sorts of environmental issues – discarded ordnance, use of coral reefs for runways, introduction of pests, the clearance of trees, and so on.

Did any of these home fronts have situations that were unique to these areas? Can you give me some examples?

Yes they certainly did. Some colonies were conquered by the Japanese, ushering in five long years of often brutal occupation and the tanking of economies. Burma, Malaya and Singapore, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Christmas Island, Hong Kong, the Solomon Islands, Borneo, Sarawak – it's some list. In some of these territories, local armed forces – ethnic Burmans, for instance, or Chinese people in Malaya – had a significant role to play in defeating the occupier, then resisting Britain's return after the war. Victims of the Holocaust left Central Europe and attempted to get into the Palestine Mandate; some did, others were accommodated in parts of Africa, in the Caribbean, and in Mauritius. Cyprus had a situation in which Greek Cypriots watched the fate of Greece with anguish, and the movement for union with Greece, which was to create the post-war 'emergency', gained in strength. West African colonies, surrounded by Vichy territory, had their own unique experiences, their significance to the war inflated because of their position vis-à-vis Atlantic sea lanes, and the oversea and overland 'air ferry route' that funnelled thousands of warplanes from Britain and America to Middle Eastern and South Asian fighting fronts by way of the Gold Coast and Nigeria.

The situation in British Imperial India during the war was particularly fraught, can you talk a bit about this?

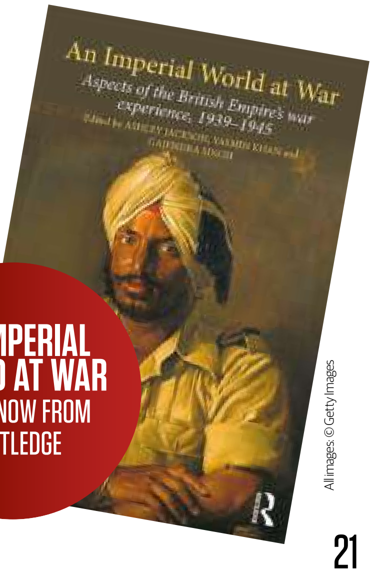
If the Japanese hadn't so successfully entered the war, defeating Allied forces across the Asia Pacific region and effecting the biggest colonial land grab in history, things would have been more sedate in India. But with the Japanese on its eastern border following the conquest of Burma, and potentially dominant in the seas around, a crisis situation developed rapidly in early 1942. This led to the Cripps Mission, and the attempt by Britain to bargain war support for future political advance. It led to Gandhi and the Indian National Congress's 'Quit India' movement and its repression. And it led, ultimately, to the creation of Pakistan and India's early advance to independence.

Has the contribution of British imperial territories to the overall war effort been overlooked? If so, why?

Not by the scholars around the world who have been writing books and articles on the subject for the last 30 years and more! By British national history, yes, meaning by British popular culture, too. Part of this is because of the turn to the 'Britain alone' narrative, which occurred after the war (during it, British people were much more aware of the imperial contribution, in part because they'd seen elements of it with their own eyes).

It does raise an eyebrow, observing, for example, Sky TV's recent announcement that they were putting the 'forgotten' history of the Empire back in for a new series. They're only on to it because of the work of those scholars over many years in banging the drum about imperial participation. This is true of the scholarship that has led to the expansion of the picture of the 'British' military during the war beyond the forces of the dominions and India, to embrace those from African colonies and a host of others, be they 'teeth arm' or 'rear echelon' units.

Maturing British understanding of the imperial past in terms of popular culture and general history is also beginning to more satisfactorily embrace the colonial home front (as opposed to just colonial/imperial military participation). So, it's taken some time for the imperial angle to gain better representation in British national historical awareness at the level of popular history and popular culture. This is the way things work; specialist scholars chisel away, and a body of literature forms. It then impacts more general histories (recent seminal general works, for instance, by David Edgerton, Dan Todman, and Richard Overy, for example) and, together, they impact popular culture, knowledge, and understanding. One can see this happening clearly in this sphere in Britain in the last decade or two.


An Imperial World at War
Aspects of the British Empire's war experience, 1939–1945
Edited by Ashley Jackson, Yasmin Khan and Gajendra Singh
R

AN IMPERIAL WORLD AT WAR
IS OUT NOW FROM ROUTLEDGE

All images © Getty Images

HOME FRONT MUSEUMS AND SITES

From Churchill's underground bunker to museums on Georgia's coast, five sites that commemorate and celebrate the home front

1 THORPE CAMP
LINCOLNSHIRE, UNITED KINGDOM

Housed at the former RAF barracks for RAF Woodhall Spa, Thorpe Camp Visitor Centre is now devoted to preserving the site's history. During the war, four squadrons flew out of Woodhall Spa, including Squadron 617 – better known as the Dambusters.

However, Thorpe Camp has expanded to include other aspects of Lincolnshire's World War II history, including the home front. Visitors to the camp can see a mockup of the average WWII kitchen, as well as various items available at home. There is also an air cadets exhibit, detailing their history and role in the war. Alongside this, the visitor centre contains numerous displays including a Special Operations Executive Room, a Lancaster Bomber exhibit, plus areas devoted to the Cold War.

Visitors to Thorpe Camp may also be interested in the 'We'll Meet Again: WWII Museum' in Freiston Shore, a mere half-hour drive from Thorpe Camp. This museum contains a number of British home front artefacts, including an Anderson shelter. Please check the opening times and dates before travelling.

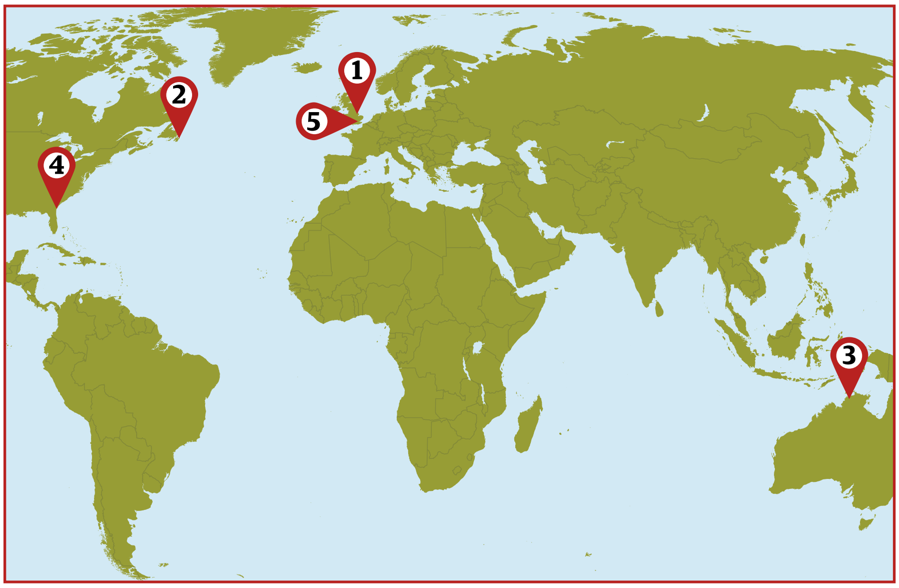
Opening times vary, please check before travelling. Entry costs £5.00 per person, children under 12 can enter for free.

Daily Mail

SINGAPORE: FIRST BRITONS ARE SAILING HOME

This newspaper is just one example of the many items held at Thorpe Camp Visitor Centre

The museum contains a facsimile of what a war time kitchen may have looked like



2 CAPE SPEAR BATTERY
NEWFOUNDLAND, CANADA

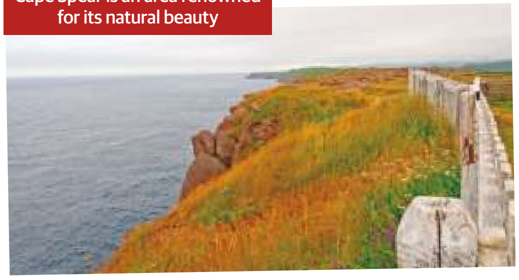
The remnants of the battery at Cape Spear

Cape Spear is an area of natural beauty in Newfoundland. Famous for its historic lighthouse, it also played a part in the defence of Canada during World War II. One of a number of surviving installations on the coast of Argentia and St John's, this gun was constructed to protect ships both leaving and entering St John's Harbour, as well as the harbour itself.

Two large guns were built and connected by underground tunnels. Large storage areas were also constructed to house ammunition. The battery can be visited by means of a trail and although some tunnels are blocked off, others have been reopened and restored so that they may be explored by the public.

Between Cape Spear and Blackhead can also be found the remains of a dummy battery. This was constructed to trick the enemy into believing it was a fortified installation and to draw enemy fire away from the actual guns during an attack.

The site can be visited most days, but some areas may be closed off.



Cape Spear is an area renowned for its natural beauty

The tunnels are open to the public and contain vintage photographs and information boards

The entrance to the Darwin tunnels

3 DARWIN OIL TUNNELS

DARWIN, AUSTRALIA

As the war raged, the city of Darwin in Australia faced a problem. It was home to a number of oil storage tanks, vital to the war effort as the fuel powered submarines, ships, aircraft, tanks, trucks and more. As such, when the Japanese bombed the city, the oil storage tanks were high on their list of targets. During devastating bombing raids in February, March and June of 1942, they were able to destroy seven of the eleven tanks.

Needing to protect the oil, plans were drawn up for new storage facilities, hidden deep beneath the city. A massive project soon began to excavate a series of tunnels, the longest nearly 200 metres in length. Unfortunately the project was fraught with setbacks. 400 men were involved in the construction but by the time they were eventually completed, the war was over and they remained unused.

Following the end of the war, the tunnels remained empty. However, in the 1950s the Australian conflict with Indonesia saw them used for their original purpose when jet fuel was stored there. The Australian fire brigade found a use for them in the 1970s and into the 1980s, filling them with thick black smoke for the purposes of training.

Now, the tunnels have been filled with wartime imagery and boards for visitors. This bizarre part of Australia's home front history is a must-visit.

Open 7 days a week (hours vary throughout the year). Adult entry $9.50.

The museum reveals the history of the St. Simons Coast Guard's rescue missions during World War II

4 WORLD WAR II HOME FRONT MUSEUM

ST. SIMONS, GEORGIA, UNITED STATES

The World War II Home Front Museum is housed in what was originally the St. Simons Coast Guard Station. This site has a connection to World War II as, on 8 April 1942, a German U-boat fired a torpedo at the Oil Tanker Oklahoma just off St. Simon's coast. Members of the coast guard were involved in the desperate operation to rescue the survivors.

Now the Coastal Georgia Historical Society has transformed the site into the World War II Home Front Museum. Inside, visitors can find a number of activities designed to engage young children with the history of America's home front, including a game where they can spot the skies for enemy aircraft.

The museum is one of ten sites on the Georgia World War II Heritage Trail that are scattered across the state. The Trail creates an overarching experience for visitors, each focusing on a different aspect of America's involvement in World War II.

Open 10am to 5pm, Monday to Saturday and 12pm to 5pm on Sunday. Adult tickets begin at $12.

5 CHURCHILL WAR ROOMS

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

The Cabinet War Rooms were constructed between 1938 and 1939, but their history goes back to the 1920s. Due to the technological advancements made during World War I, concern about London becoming a target in a potential future war had grown and so evacuation plans for essential government figures began to be drafted. When this proved impractical, Winston Churchill advocated for an underground bunker to be constructed and the project was completed a mere week before the declaration of war.

In this underground space, senior military figures met with Churchill's cabinet and planned the ongoing war in relative safety. However, Churchill was enraged when he discovered that the war rooms were not as bomb proof as he believed. The war rooms were strengthened with slabs of concrete and steel, though those inside were under no illusions that the shelter was still susceptible to a larger hit.

The complex labyrinth of rooms was left abandoned until the 1980s when the Imperial War Museums took over the space, opening them to the public in 1984. Now, the war rooms are complemented by a museum devoted to Winston Churchill's life and career. Visitors to the complex can see sights such as the famous map room and gun racks that, in the worst case scenario, would have been used by government staff in the event of an invasion by German paratroopers.

Open 9.30am to 6.30pm daily. Adult tickets start from £24.50 for seniors and concessions.

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One of the many rooms open to the public at the Churchill War Rooms

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Illustrations by: Kevin McGivern

HISTORY OF SANTA

Uncover eight centuries of festive folklore, from the Yule Lads to the Christmas Goat

Written by Emily Staniforth

At Christmas time, the practice of gift giving stands as a central element in the celebration of the winter holiday. In many cultures and countries around the world, the act of giving presents is carried out by a jolly, mystical figure known for his white beard, red coat and sleigh. Santa Claus, or Father Christmas as he is also often known, has become such a dominant part of Christmas traditions, but where did he come from and how has he managed to embed himself in so many Christmas-celebrating communities?

The Life of St Nicholas

The origins of Santa Claus can be traced all the way back to Asia Minor in the 3rd century CE. At this time, a pious and influential man named Nicholas was serving as the Bishop of Myra in modern day Turkiye. Nicholas had been born in the small village of Patara and raised by his wealthy parents as a steadfast Christian, and at an early age had decided that he wanted to enter the ministry. His parents died at some point during his childhood, possibly from plague, leaving Nicholas a vast inheritance. However, the young man still strived to enter the priesthood and became a bishop. At this time in his life, his youth clearly caught the attention of others as he has been remembered by history as the Boy Bishop.

Nicholas obeyed the teachings of Jesus Christ faithfully and ensured that the fortune he had inherited upon his parents' deaths was used to help those

> "NICHOLAS ENSURED THE FORTUNE HE HAD INHERITED WAS USED TO HELP THOSE GOING THROUGH HARDSHIP"

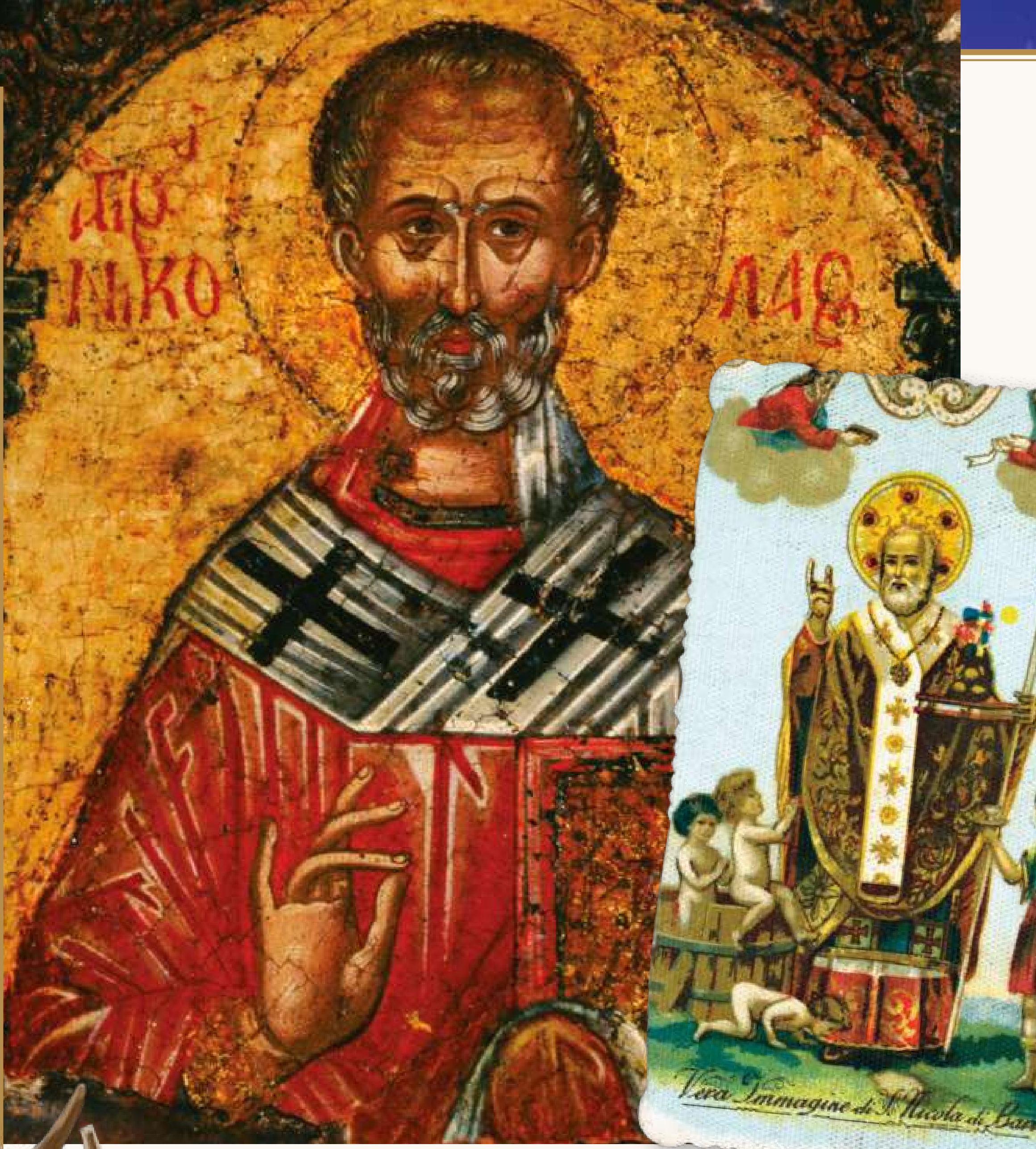
Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer

Where did the story of Santa Claus' most famous sidekick come from?

Different versions of Santa Claus around the world have a variety of friends and assistants that accompany them on their journeys to deliver presents, or help them prepare for the Christmas period. Arguably, of all these sidekicks, Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer is the most famous internationally. But Rudolph was a surprisingly recent addition to the group of reindeer who had become part of Santa Claus' story.

The sleigh-pulling reindeer were first introduced into the legend of Santa in 1821, when a poem from *The Children's Friend: A New Year's Present To The Little Ones From Five To Twelve* described flying reindeer driving Santa over the chimney tops. It is not clear why the anonymous author decided to choose reindeer, but the idea quickly caught on.

It wasn't until over 100 years later that the most famous reindeer appeared on the scene. Rudolph was created by copywriter Robert L May in 1939, when he was asked by his employers at the department store Montgomery Ward to create a fun Christmas story that could be given out to their customers. The story of Rudolph and his bright red nose navigating Santa's sleigh through a foggy night became hugely popular, and went on to inspire Gene Autry's song of 1949. From May's story, Rudolph grew to become Santa's most iconic sidekick.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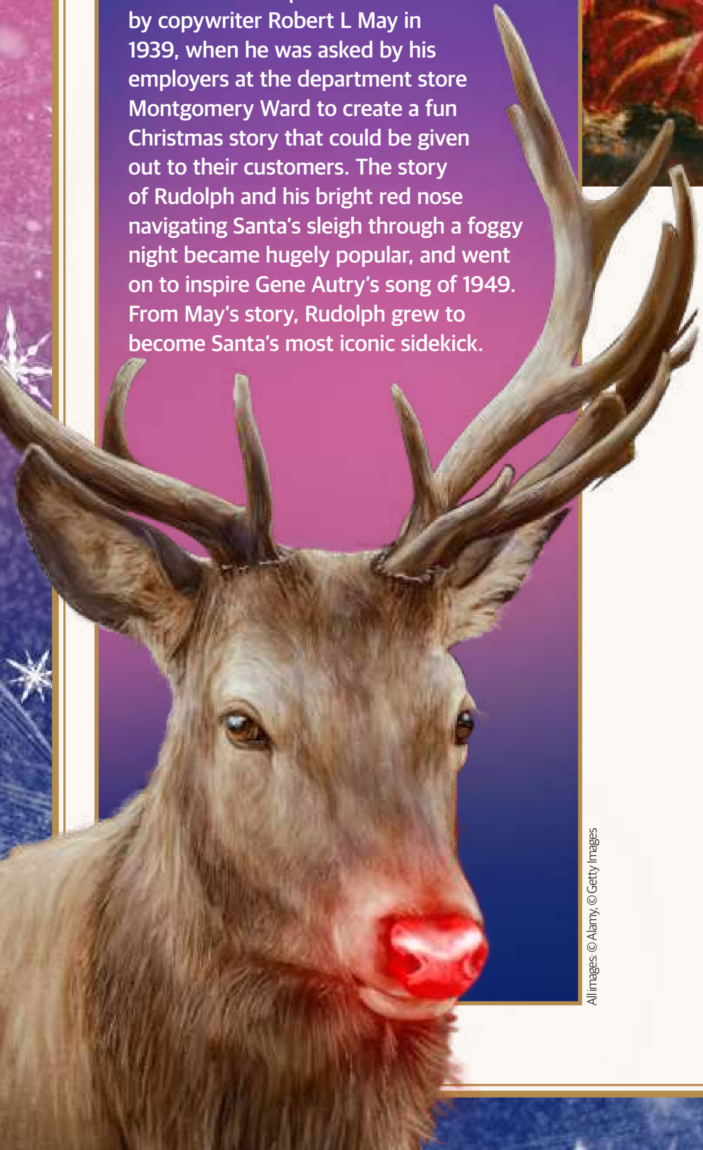


going through hardship and suffering. Giving away all his wealth to the needy resulted in Nicholas garnering a reputation as extremely generous and kind. He was also known for being particularly warm and caring towards children, with many stories of kindness and protection towards children associated with the bishop. One story of note, that is often credited with Nicholas' reputation for doing good deeds and connection to children, tells of how the bishop saved three sisters from being sold into slavery by their father, who could not afford to give them a dowry for marriage, by gifting them with the money they desperately needed.

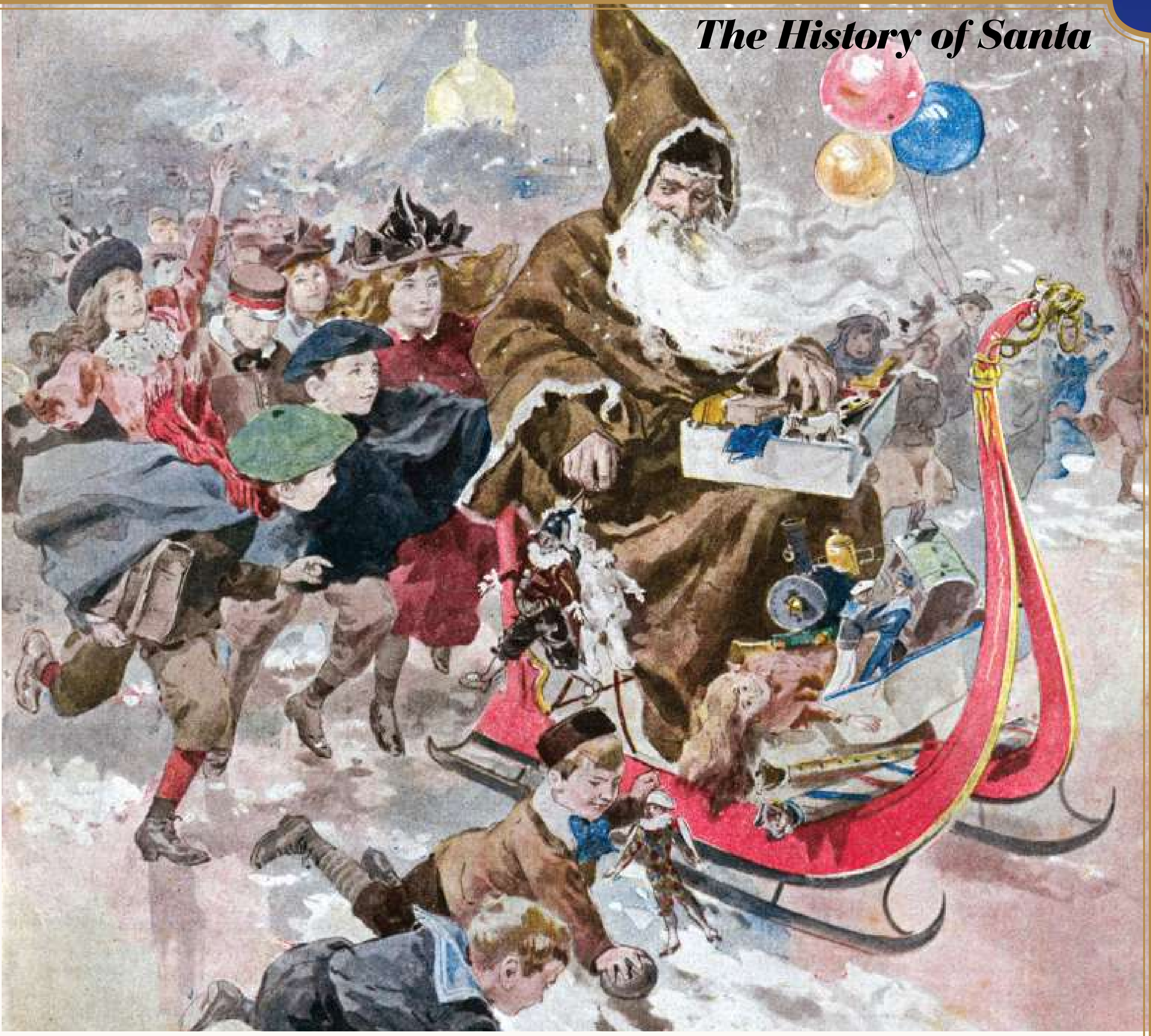
From Saint to Santa

Bishop Nicholas lived a long life and died at the age of 73 in 343 CE. The date of his death, 6 December, was later commemorated as St Nicholas' Day, upon which his legacy of generosity and good will is celebrated around the world. The process of Nicholas gaining the status of sainthood is fairly murky as he appears to have been venerated as a saint long before the formal procedures of canonisation were created by the Catholic Church in the later 10th century. However, it is likely that Nicholas' reputation led to him being revered as a saint by those who remembered him in the localities and regions in which he operated, before stories of his good deeds in life began to spread to wider areas.

So, how did St Nicholas evolve into the jolly old man we know as Santa Claus? As a saint he was venerated by Catholics in Christian countries around the world.

> "THE CUSTOM OF ST NICHOLAS GIVING OUT PRESENTS SPREAD FROM THE NETHERLANDS TO WIDER EUROPE"

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images



RIGHT The British Father Christmas began to deliver presents during the Victorian period

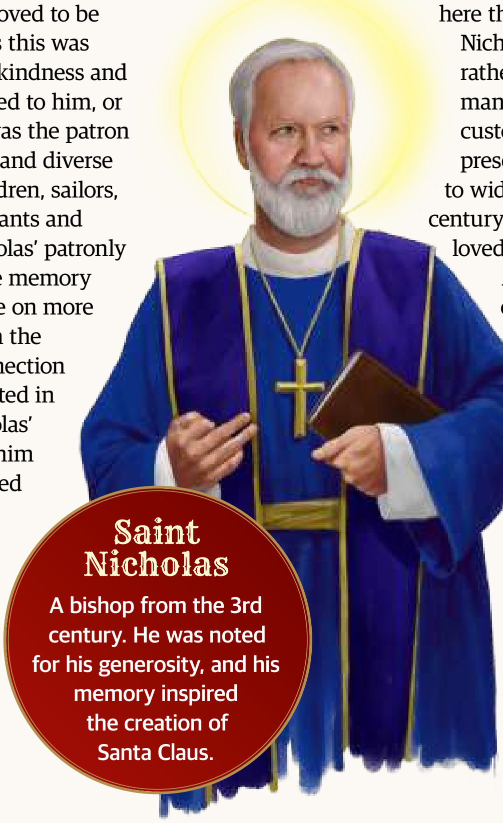
LEFT St Nicholas was renowned as a kind, generous man

LEFT-INSET A devotional image showing St Nicholas surrounded by children

However, even among the multitude of Catholic saints, Nicholas proved to be extremely popular. Perhaps this was due to the many stories of kindness and goodwill that were attributed to him, or maybe it was because he was the patron saint of such wide-ranging and diverse subsections of society: children, sailors, fisherman, teachers, merchants and orphans all fall under Nicholas' patronly jurisdiction. Either way, the memory of St Nicholas began to take on more and more prominence from the 1200s and his specific connection with children was highlighted in the celebrations of St Nicholas' Day, when the tradition of him leaving gifts for well-behaved children on the eve of 6 December was born.

The Evolution of Santa

It was in the Netherlands that St Nicholas began to be referred to as Sinterklaas, the name from which Santa Claus is derived, and it was here that the earliest version of St Nicholas as a jolly friend to children rather than a strict and pious holy man first appeared in 1163. The custom of St Nicholas giving out presents spread from the Netherlands to wider Europe during the 12th century, eventually becoming a much-loved tradition.

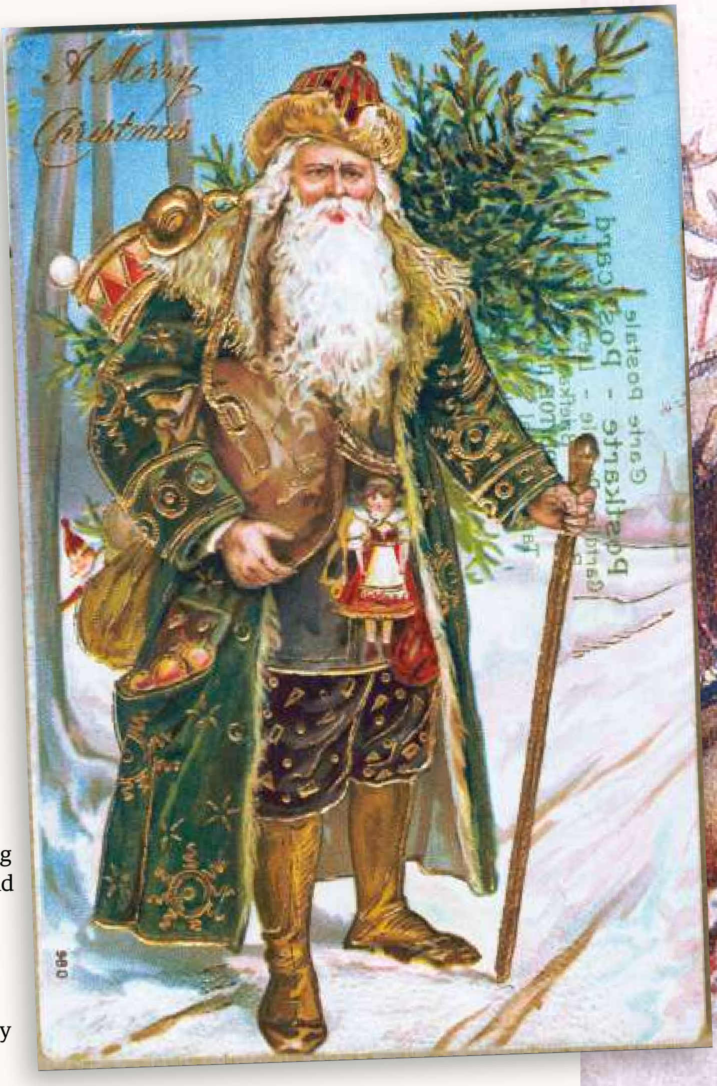


Saint Nicholas

A bishop from the 3rd century. He was noted for his generosity, and his memory inspired the creation of Santa Claus.

Aside from giving gifts, the characteristics of the modern Santa Claus come from a variety of places. According to Brian Handwerk in National Geographic: "The strict saint took on some aspects of earlier European deities, like the Roman Saturn or the Norse Odin, who appeared as white-bearded men and had magical powers like flight. He also ensured that kids toed the line by saying their prayers and practising good behaviour." It is this incarnation of the jolly, bearded Santa that somehow found its way over to North America in later centuries, possibly through the Dutch immigrants who made their home in the New World.

In the US, the story of Santa Claus began to develop through the works of several writers who took inspiration from the Dutch tales of Sinterklaas. Through Washington Irving's *History Of New York*, Sinterklaas was said to ride through the skies on a flying wagon and enter houses by going down chimneys. These facets of the Santa Claus story began to spread, and were added to by later American writers who first wrote of Santa as a man dressed in red, riding in a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer. An anonymous poem of 1821 was also responsible for the change in Santa's arrival date from St Nicholas' Day (6 December) to Christmas Eve. A hugely popular poem by Clement Clarke Moore was then published in 1823 that helped embed all these ideas firmly into America's Santa Claus folklore. The poem, called *A Visit From St Nicholas* but more commonly known as *Twas The Night Before Christmas*, is still a much-loved



poem that summarises much of the Santa most Americans still recognise. A final touch by cartoonist Thomas Nast in the 1800s introduced the concepts of a base and workshop in the North Pole to Santa's backstory.

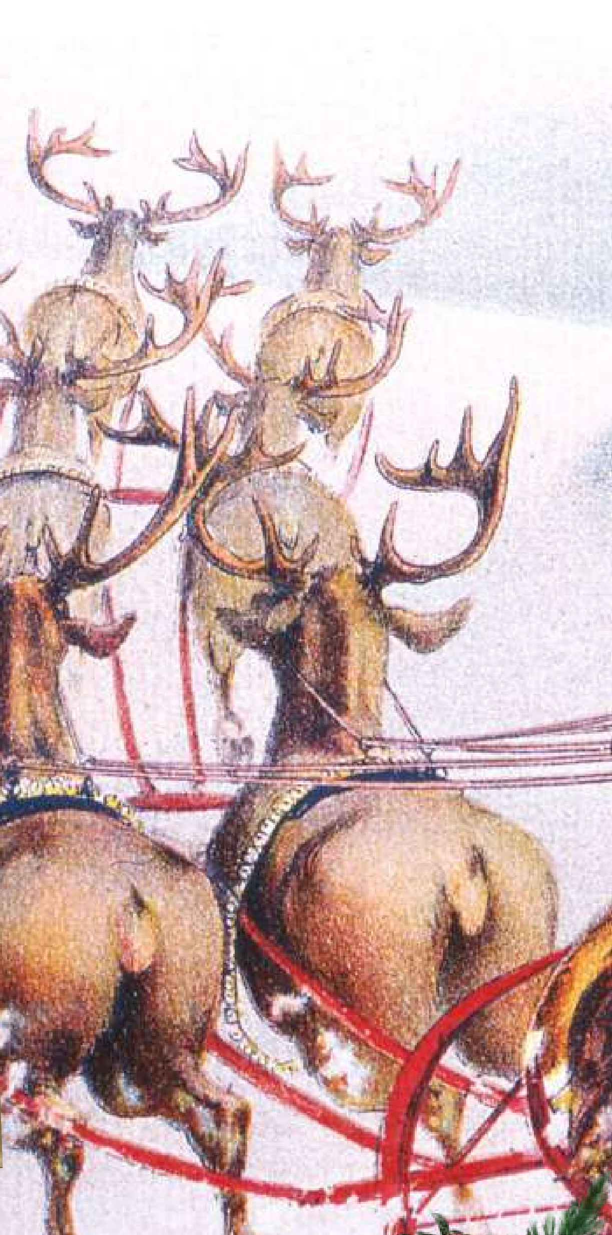
Santa in the United Kingdom has slightly different origins to those of the American incarnation, despite both countries now having extremely similar Santa Claus traditions. It is not uncommon to hear the British refer to Santa as Father Christmas, with both names tending to be interchangeable when referring to the bearded gift giver. However, the legend of Father Christmas began as a uniquely English phenomenon. Unlike in many other places in Europe, St Nicholas' Day has never been a day for noteworthy celebrations in the UK, with the main December celebrations being centred around Christmas Day and the subsequent Twelve Days of Christmas. Therefore, St Nicholas was never a particularly revered figure and so Santa Claus did not take off in Britain in the same way he did elsewhere. Instead, Father Christmas served as the chosen character to bring presents on Christmas Eve.

> "REGIONAL FOLKLORE PLAYS A MAJOR PART IN THE HISTORY OF MANY SANTA-ESQUE FIGURES ACROSS THE WORLD"

Father Christmas' origins lie in his initial purpose as a personification of the Christmas season, rather than a saint. Going by a variety of names, Father Christmas often appeared in literature and the arts from the 15th century as a "Lord of Misrule" who watched over the Christmas festivities as a fun-loving, partying character. It is possible that this idea could have come from an old pagan tradition that predates the life of St Nicholas, according to Kirsty O'Rourke in a blog for the University of York. However, any versions of Father Christmas up until the 17th century were vague and disparate in detail, until the playwright Ben Jonson described a character called Old Christmas in his play *Christmas, His Masque* (first performed in 1616) whose physical appearance included the iconic beard.

Eventually, the Victorian era saw an overhaul in Father Christmas' image as children and the family unit began to become more valued by British society. He started to represent joy and jollity in a more wholesome and child-appropriate sense than the original merry-making Father Christmas had. At the same time, the American Santa Claus was starting to infiltrate British culture. The similarities between the two figures resulted in the pair essentially merging to the point that there was no longer a difference between them. From then on, the Santa Claus/Father Christmas tale of modern times took off in the UK.

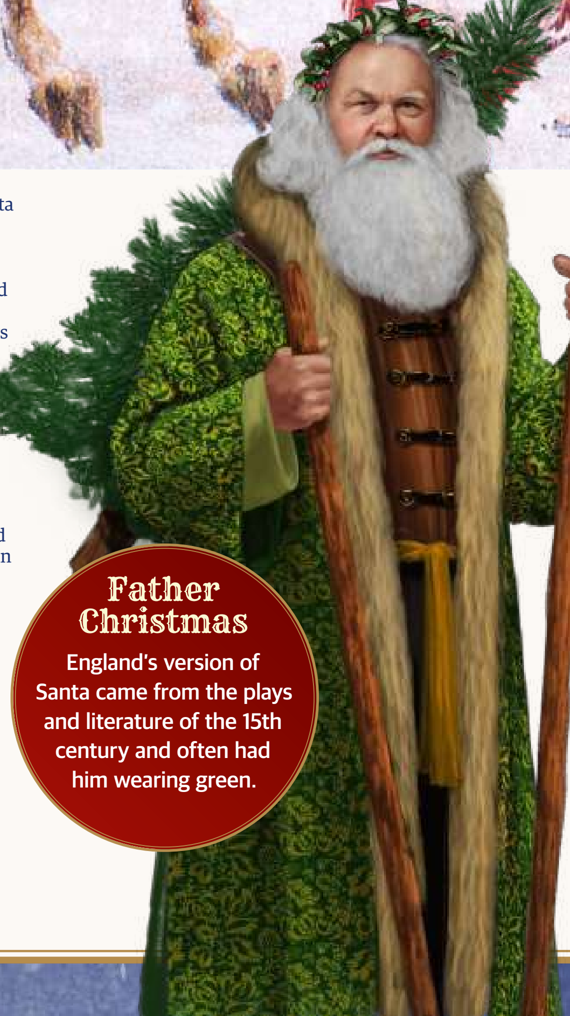
Though it may seem surprising that the UK and the US versions of Santa have such different origins, it is not unusual for different countries to have their own variations on the Santa Claus tradition. Regional folklore plays a major part in the history of many Santa-esque figures across the world, meaning that though many of these versions share characteristics of Santa Claus, they all have their own



ABOVE-LEFT Santa Claus' robes were not always defined as red, with him often being depicted wearing green among other colours

ABOVE Santa's sleigh being pulled by reindeer was introduced in the 19th century

FAR RIGHT Krampus is believed to have his origins in Norse mythology



Father Christmas

England's version of Santa came from the plays and literature of the 15th century and often had him wearing green.

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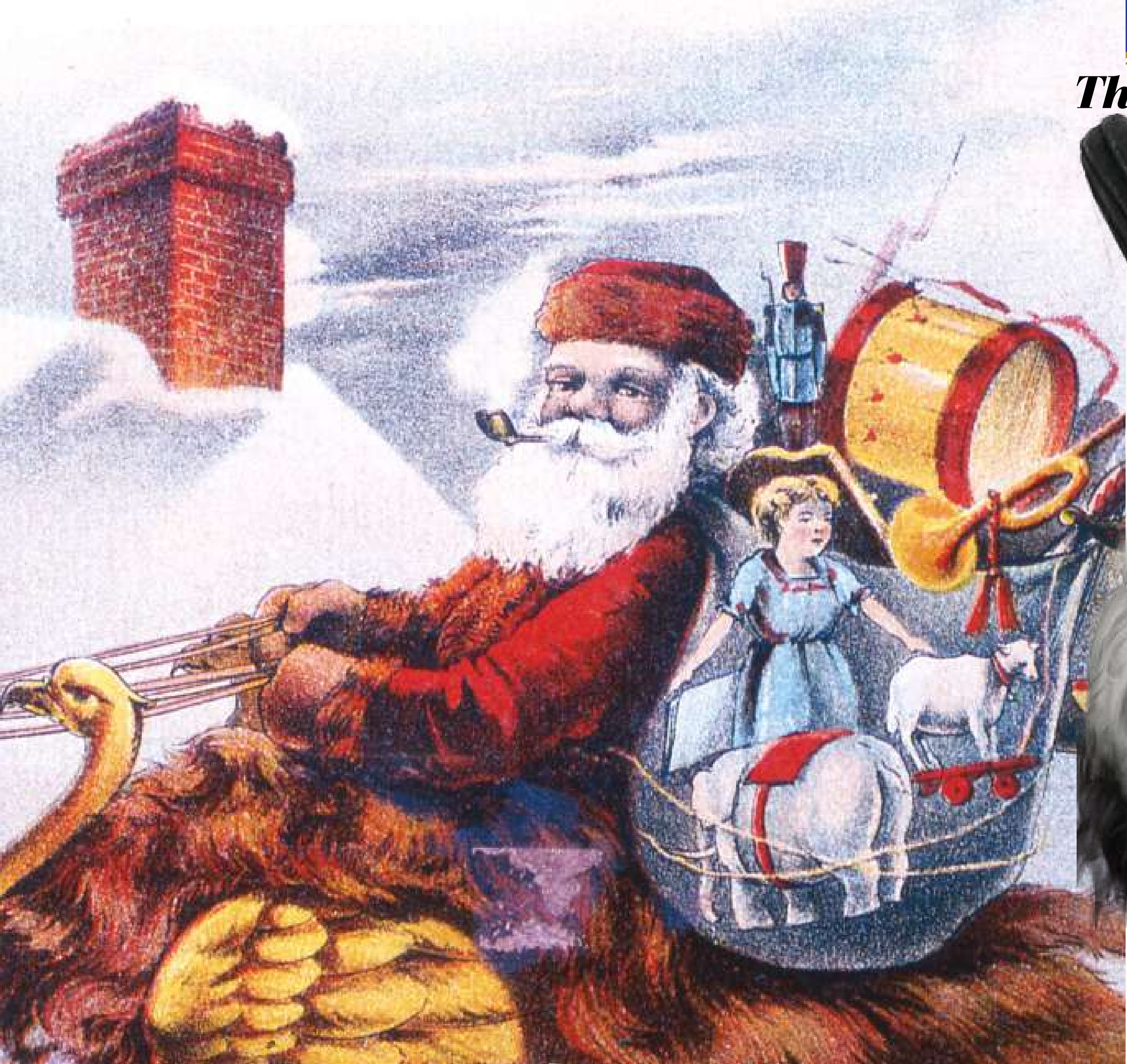
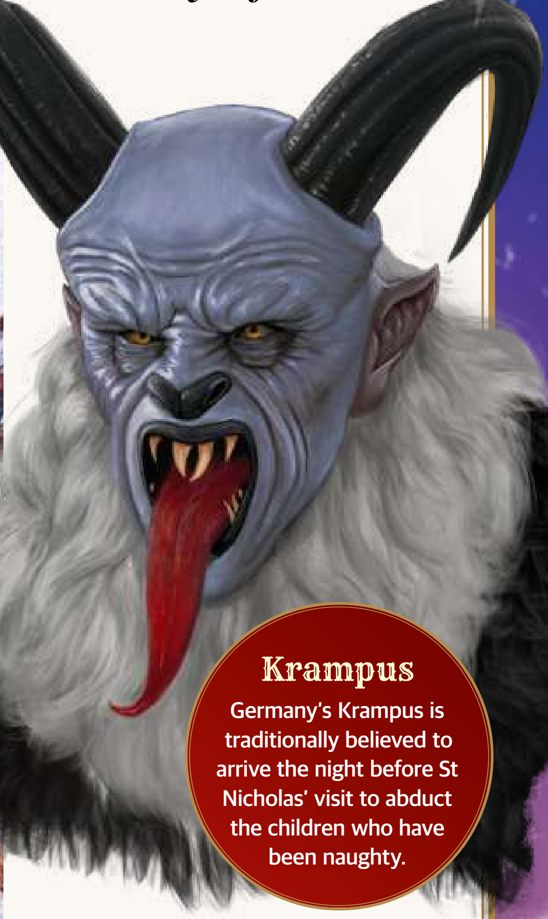
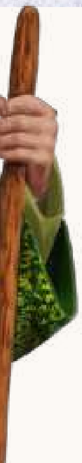
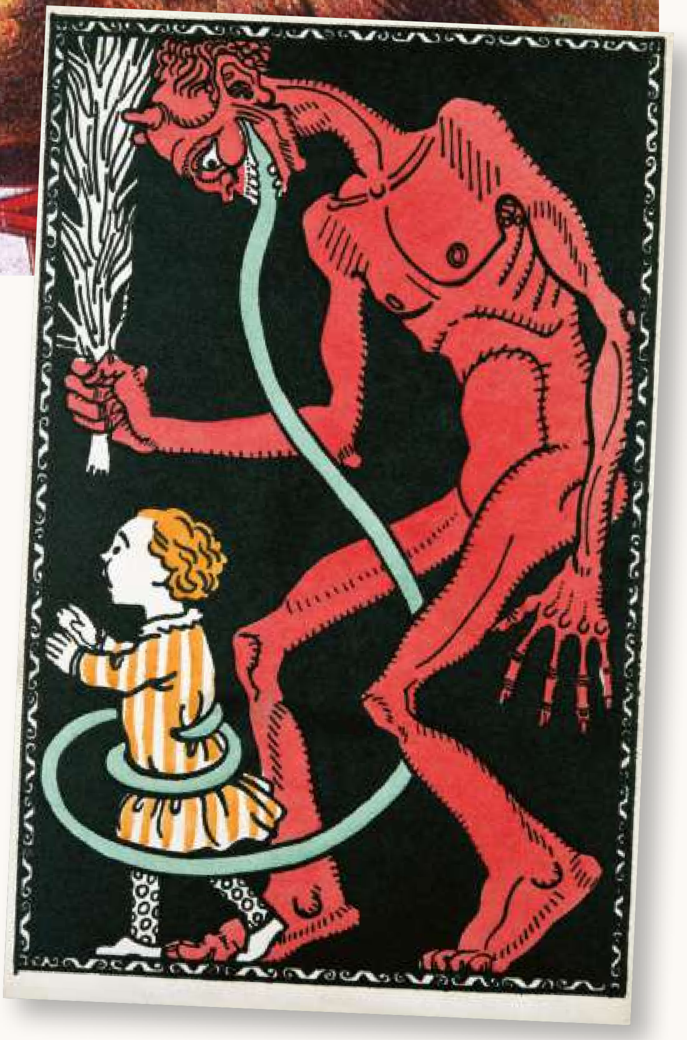




Krampus

Germany's Krampus is traditionally believed to arrive the night before St Nicholas' visit to abduct the children who have been naughty.





idiosyncrasies. In a twist on the Western Santa, for example, Russia's Ded Moroz is a magical, wizard-like man with a long white beard and multi-coloured robes (often blue and white) who delivers gifts to good children on New Year's Eve. Also known as Grandfather Frost, Ded Moroz has roots in old Slavic traditions and though similar in several ways to Santa Claus, he is said to live in a Russian town rather than the North Pole, has a sled pulled by horses not reindeer, and is accompanied on his rounds by his granddaughter Snegurochka (the Snow Maiden).

In Sweden, like in the UK, a later association with Santa Claus and St Nicholas has led to an enduring figure from the country's folklore becoming more Santa-like. The Tomte, or Christmas Gnomes, began as the mythical spirits of farmers who were the first to work a particular area of land. While many tales were linked to the Tomte, they were largely seen as a good omen as they were believed to protect the home, children and animals, despite being renowned for their mischievous, trouble-making side. One of the main aspects of their appearance, aside from being three feet tall, was that they were old men with long white beards, very like the description that came to characterise Santa Claus. Much like in the US, the mixing of Tomte folklore with St Nicholas came to be thanks to the works of authors who embellished tales of the Tomte with elements of the St Nicholas story, particularly during the 1800s. Nowadays, Tomte is a full-sized jolly man who delivers presents to Swedish children.

The Dark Side of Santa

In the UK and USA, the prospect of ending up on Santa's naughty list and thus not receiving a visit from him on Christmas Eve is deemed to be a harsh enough punishment for children who exhibit bad behaviours. However, some cultures take this idea of the naughty list one step further, with children having been terrified for centuries by fictitious villains who stalk through the winter nights.

One of the most well-known devilish Christmas figures from across the world is Europe's evil alternative to Santa – Krampus. The infamous horned devil-creature first appeared in Germany in the 12th century and is believed to derive from old Norse mythology. He is said to be the son of Hel, the god of the underworld, and ▶

appears on the eve of 5 December to steal away the naughty children. The next day, St Nicholas' Day, is celebrated and Santa comes to leave gifts for the good children. While the tradition of Krampus has fallen out of favour on multiple occasions since its conception, recent years have seen a surge in Krampus' popularity outside of Germany and other countries that honour him like Austria and Czechia, with Krampus events also beginning to take place across the US.

Krampus is not the only dark Christmas figure to have come from Germanic folklore. Knecht Ruprecht is similar to Krampus in that he is associated with the punishment of naughty children, though the origins of this particular tale are less well known. There are several different versions of Knecht Ruprecht, with some children told that he is a farmhand who travels with St Nicholas as an assistant, and others told he is a horned elf-like creature (akin to Krampus) who accompanies the saint. Different narratives also describe Knecht Ruprecht as the figure who travels with one of Germany's other gift-givers, Christkindl. It is also unclear when the Knecht Ruprecht story first emerged, however most historians have placed the timing between the 16th and 17th centuries. Tradition has it that Knecht Ruprecht, like Krampus, scares children into behaving well. It is said that he will hit those children who have been naughty with a bag of ashes, or in more extreme versions of the story, abduct them.

Similarly to the legends of both Krampus and Knecht Ruprecht, the character of Père Fouettard serves as a warning to the children of France. Père Fouettard, like Knecht Ruprecht, accompanies St Nicholas on his rounds, punishing the children who are not deemed to have behaved well enough to receive a gift. He is described as dressing in rags and carrying some sort of stick or whip that he uses to beat naughty kids for their ill deeds.

ABOVE A group of people dressed up as Iceland's mischievous Yule Lads

ABOVE-INSET In Iceland you may also spot the cannibalistic ogres Grýla and Leppalúði, the parents of the Yule Lads

Santa Claus

The most common depiction of Santa today is an amalgamation of folklore, advertising and popular stories.

Replacing St Nick

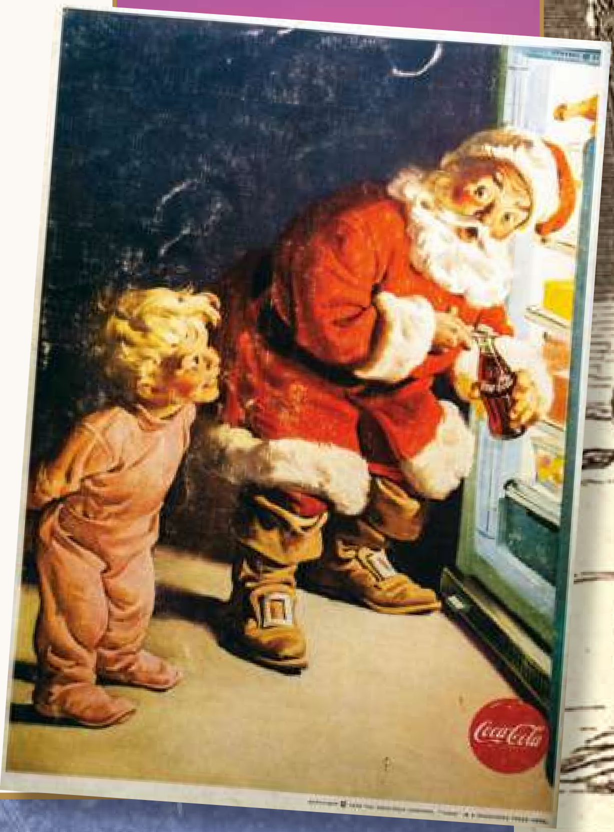
Santa Claus is not as universal as one may believe. During the widespread Protestant Reformation of the 1500s, the Catholic St Nicholas fell out of favour in many European states and the decline in the popularity of St Nicholas led to a variety of alternative gift givers, derived from regional folklore,

Santa and Coca-Cola

Was the brand really responsible for Santa's legendary red outfit?

The subject of many a Christmas cracker fact, it is well known, particularly in the US and the UK, that Santa Claus used to wear green robes, rather than the iconic red robes we now always see him dressed in. Coca-Cola, the famous drink brand, is generally considered to be the reason for this change in the colour of Santa's clothing. When the company first began to use Santa Claus in advertising from the 1920s, they created an image of him that more closely resembles the bright red-clad Santa we are familiar with today, rather than the interpretations of the previous century.

Coca-Cola themselves do not claim credit for Santa's red robe, but do agree that the depictions of Santa in their advertising is partly responsible for his modern appearance. Taking inspiration from Moore's *A Visit From St Nicholas*, illustrator Haddon Sundblom created our jolly Santa in 1931. Coca-Cola's website states: "Moore's description of St. Nick led to an image of a warm, friendly, pleasantly plump and human Santa. (And even though it's often said that Santa wears a red coat because red is the colour of Coca-Cola, Santa appeared in a red coat before Sundblom painted him.)"



Yule Lads

The Icelandic Yule Lads are 13 mischievous characters said to be the children of child-napping trolls.

coming into play. While the popularity of Santa did later experience a resurgence, many of these other traditions, which were originally created to replace St Nicholas, continue to be honoured.

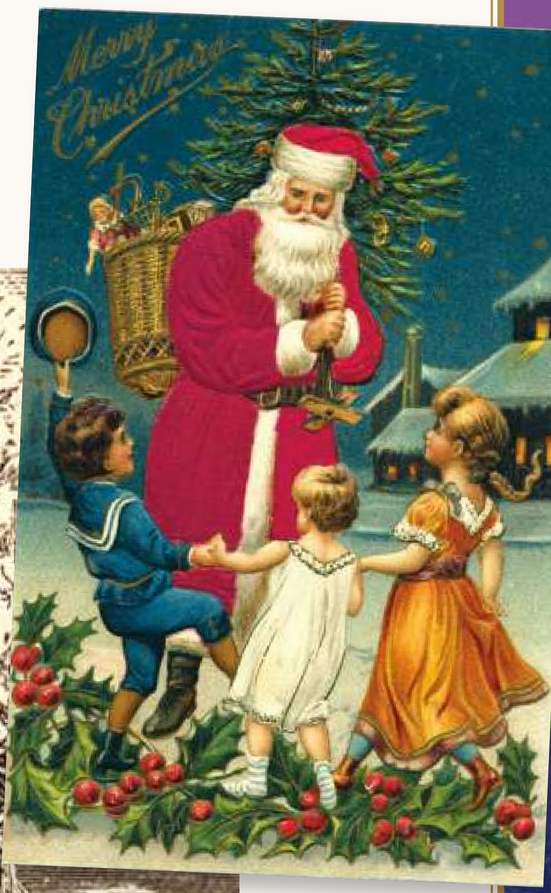
Some of the figures that are similar to Santa Claus and remain prevalent throughout the world, still leaving gifts for well-behaved children during the festive winter, tend to fall into two categories: the Christ Child and the Three Magi. Both emanate from the Nativity story of the *Bible* and thus, like Santa, have strong Christian origins though are arguably more fitting to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ than Santa.

> "DEPICTIONS OF CHRISTKIND BEGAN TO RESEMBLE THE APPEARANCE OF THE ICONIC ANGEL WHO ANNOUNCES THE BIRTH OF JESUS"

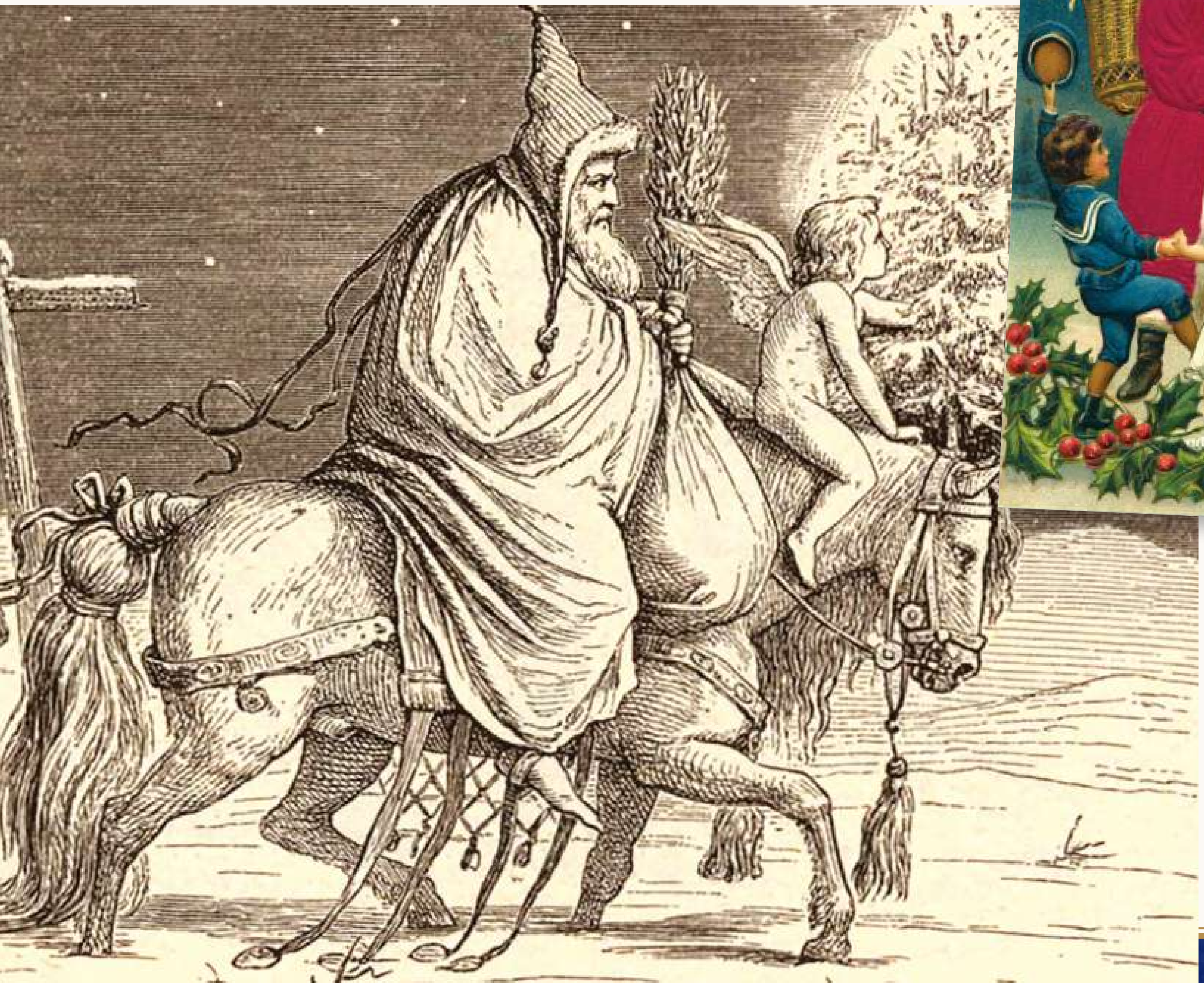
Reformer Martin Luther believed that the Christkind (Christ Child) was a much more suitable figure to bring the children of the Germanic lands their presents. He also decided that the Christkind should bring presents on the night before 25 December, rather than on St Nicholas' Day, to put a greater emphasis on the day of Jesus' birth. So, from the 1500s, children in German-speaking countries tended to be served by Christkind rather than St Nick. Over time, depictions of Christkind began to resemble the appearance of the iconic angel who announces the birth of Jesus in traditional German Christmas plays as opposed to Christ himself. The image of the angel merged with the qualities of the Christkind to create the golden-haired, winged woman who most Germans recognise as the Christkind today. Over time, the idea of the Christkind spread outside of the Germanic region to become a staple of Christmas in several other countries including Switzerland, Poland and Croatia, as well as in some areas of Latin America like southern Brazil.

The Magi, or Three Wise Men, are central figures in the Nativity story and brought gifts to the Baby Jesus after his birth. It is therefore unsurprising that the Magi would serve as the perfect vessel through which children would receive

▶



ABOVE A typical depiction of Santa Claus as he has come to be known in the UK and USA



LEFT An image of Knecht Ruprecht alongside the Christkindl

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MAIN The Magi arrive in style at the celebratory parade on Epiphany in Spain

TOP-RIGHT Ded Moroz or Grandfather Frost in the form of Russian dolls

BELOW-RIGHT The Finnish Joulupukki ('Yule Goat') now has an appearance akin to the recognisable Santa Claus

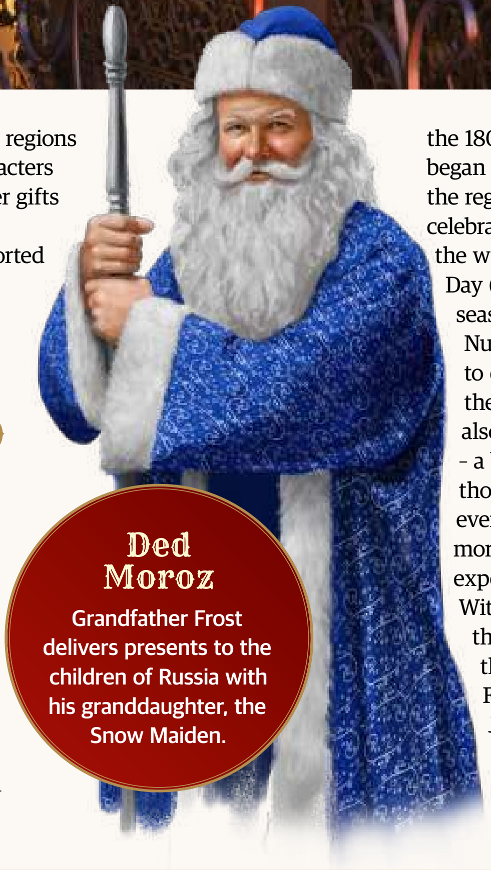
presents for Christmas. In many Hispanic cultures, the celebration of Epiphany on 6 January sees children given gifts of sweets and money by the Reyes Magos (Wise Men). The traditions to celebrate the Magi differ from country to country, but still remain important festivals that continue to take place despite the rise in popularity of Santa Claus.

> "EVIL SPIRITS IN THE FORM OF THE NUUTTIPUKKI WOULD VISIT EACH HOUSE TO DEMAND FOOD, SCARING CHILDREN AS THEY WENT"

Unique Gift Givers

Not all Christmas visitors fit into the models of Santa, the Christ Child and the Magi. Some countries and regions have entirely unique characters who are believed to deliver gifts and treats for children.

The Finnish have purported themselves to be the creator of the modern Santa Claus through their own version of the gift-giver called Joulupukki. Translated to mean the Yule Goat, Joulupukki was formed in the 1800s when the legend of St Nicholas began to become more well known in the region. Before this, Finland had been celebrating the pagan festival of Yule in the winter for centuries. On St Knut's Day (13 January), the last day of the Yule season, evil spirits in the form of the Nuuttipukki would visit each house to demand food, scaring children as they went. The Nuuttipukki were also described as goat-like creatures – a bit like Germany's Krampus – and though they were a dark entity, they eventually evolved into something more akin to the jolly Santa Claus experienced elsewhere in the world. With the popularisation of St Nicholas, the Nuuttipukki tale melded with that of St Nick to create Joulupukki, Finland's version of Santa. Though Joulupukki now takes the form of a man, the name Yule Goat has remained and he is said to reside



Ded Moroz

Grandfather Frost delivers presents to the children of Russia with his granddaughter, the Snow Maiden.

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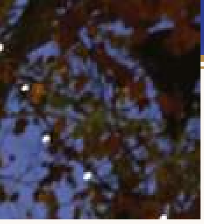


in the Finnish region of Korvatunturi, also known as Lapland.

One of the most specific Christmas traditions from around the world comes from Iceland, where not one, but 13 characters leave gifts for the native children in the nights leading up to Christmas. In the original folklore, the Yule Lads were the children of a troll named Grýla, who terrorised Iceland's children by kidnapping them and turning them into a stew. Her sons were also feared by Icelanders as although they did not engage in stealing and eating children like their mother, they would stir up trouble during the winter nights. Each of them had their own identity, with a name that befitted their troublemaking antics such as Spoon Licker, Window Peeper, Candle Beggar and Sausage Swiper to name but a few. Though the Yule Lads have retained their identities to the present day, their image has softened and while they still visit in the nights before Christmas, they leave gifts for the good children and potatoes for the naughty ones instead of focusing on their disorderly ways.

A Universal Santa?

It will have become clear throughout this jaunt through the history of Santa and his counterparts across the world, that it is impossible to trace the origins of the Christmas gift giver back to one specific event or person. Santa Claus did evolve from the legacy of the kindly St Nicholas, but many other Christmas figures from around the world have their origins in national folklore and fairy tales, and while they may have taken on traits of good old St Nick over the years, they remain separate and unique. Other people have a version of the Christ Child or the Magi bringing their presents, and some countries, like Italy, enjoy celebrating a variety of different winter figures visiting them over the holiday season. Honouring the tradition of Santa Claus in many places does not have to be mutually exclusive with enjoying the tales of other magical figures of Christmas too.

While it has only been possible to look at just a few of the traditions from around the world here, the appearance of a figure(s) similar to Santa in many Christmas-celebrating nations and states proves that the joy and happiness their visits during the winter festivities bring is universally valued. Everyone wants a piece of Santa Claus, and who can blame them? ○

Joulupukki

Finland's version of Santa Claus is an amalgamation of the legend of St Nicholas and an older pagan Yule legend.

More Christmas Gift Givers

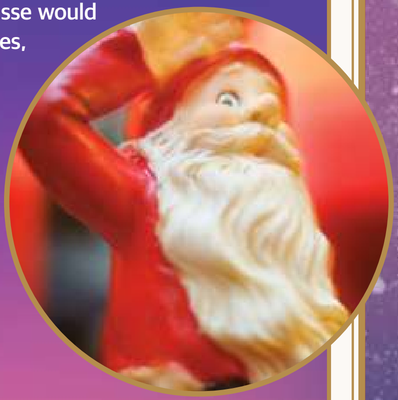
A selection of other noteworthy characters who deliver presents to children

LA BEFANA

The Italian legend of La Befana tells the story of an elderly woman who was invited by the Magi to accompany them on their journey to honour the Baby Jesus. La Befana refused, but later changed her mind and ran after the Wise Men with sweet treats to gift to the baby. However, the Magi had already gone and so La Befana dropped sweets at the doors of every child she came across in the hope of finding Jesus. Now, on Epiphany, La Befana continues to leave sweet treats for the children she passes.

JULENISSE

Like Sweden's Tomte, Norway's Julenisse was born from an older folkloric tale of the Nisse who are described as spirits or pixies. The Nisse would look after farms and homes, taking on chores and generally keeping an eye and lending a helping hand. The 1840s saw the Nisse merge with the tale of Santa Claus, at which point the Nisse became Julenisse and began to leave presents for children.



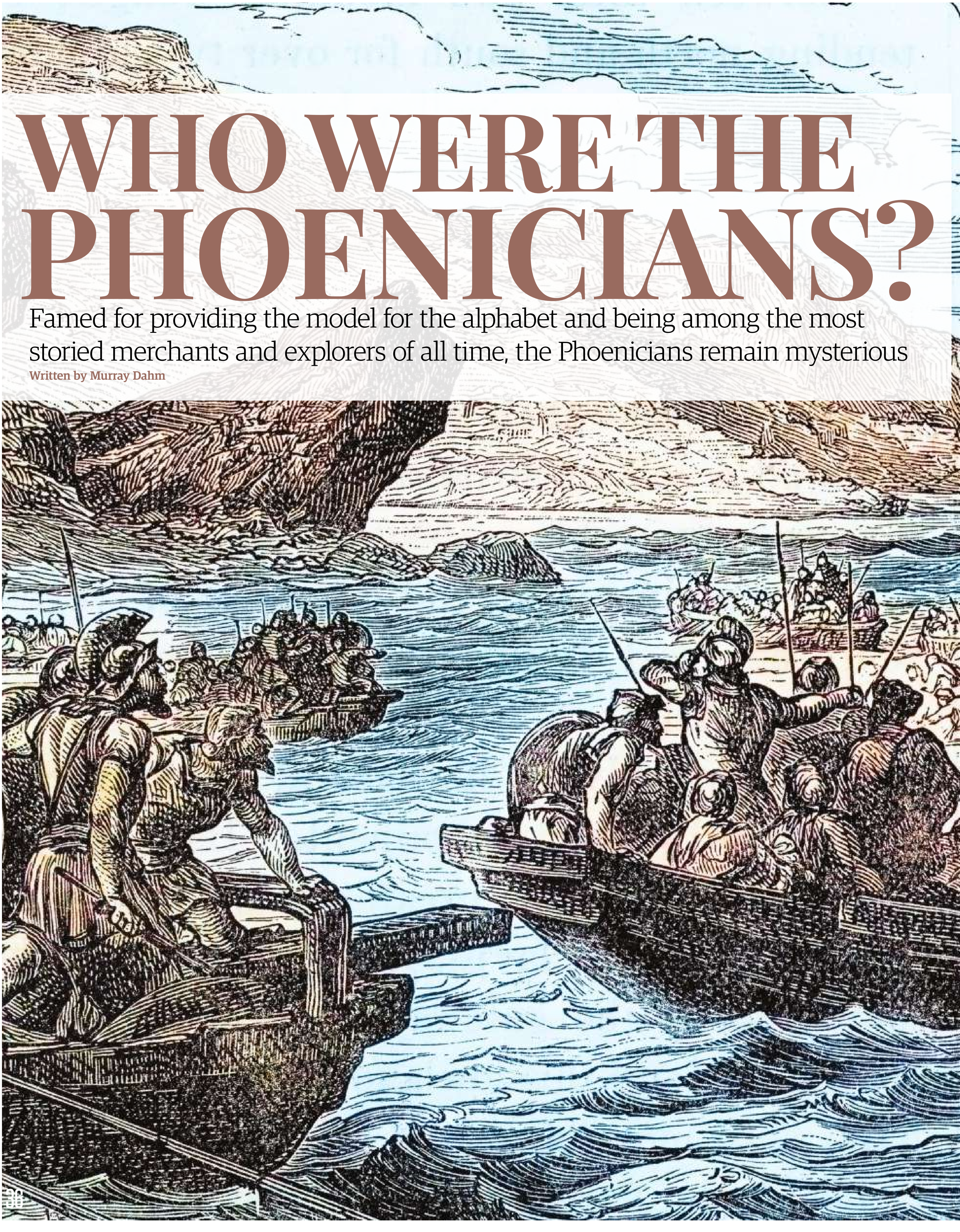
TIÓ DE NADAL

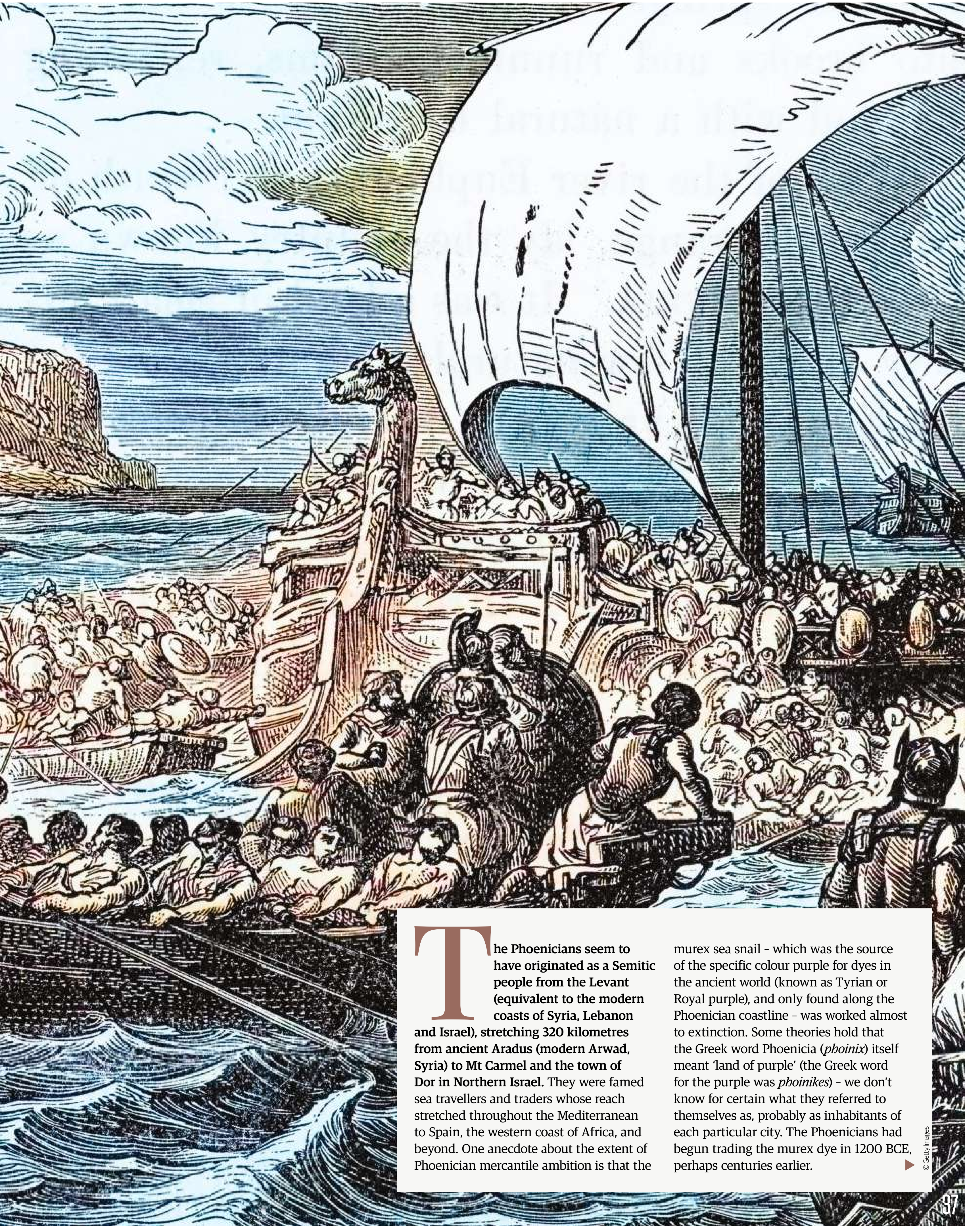
One of the strangest bringers of gifts comes from Catalonia in Spain. Here, Tió de Nadal, a hollow log with a face painted on, is 'fed' with sweets by children in the weeks leading up to Christmas. They also cover the log with a blanket to keep it warm. On Christmas Day, the children then beat the log until it defecates presents. Yes, it most certainly is an odd tradition. Of course, parents play a large part in creating the excitement of Tió de Nadal, by removing the sweets left by the children and hiding the presents Tió de Nadal 'produces' under blankets behind it until the beatings stop and the gifts are revealed.

WHO WERE THE PHOENICIANS?

Famed for providing the model for the alphabet and being among the most storied merchants and explorers of all time, the Phoenicians remain mysterious

Written by Murray Dahm

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The Phoenicians seem to have originated as a Semitic people from the Levant (equivalent to the modern coasts of Syria, Lebanon and Israel), stretching 320 kilometres from ancient Aradus (modern Arwad, Syria) to Mt Carmel and the town of Dor in Northern Israel. They were famed sea travellers and traders whose reach stretched throughout the Mediterranean to Spain, the western coast of Africa, and beyond. One anecdote about the extent of Phoenician mercantile ambition is that the murex sea snail – which was the source of the specific colour purple for dyes in the ancient world (known as Tyrian or Royal purple), and only found along the Phoenician coastline – was worked almost to extinction. Some theories hold that the Greek word Phoenicia (*phoinix*) itself meant 'land of purple' (the Greek word for the purple was *phoinikes*) – we don't know for certain what they referred to themselves as, probably as inhabitants of each particular city. The Phoenicians had begun trading the murex dye in 1200 BCE, perhaps centuries earlier. ▶

The Age of the Phoenicians is usually dated between around 1200 and 550 BCE, although Phoenician influence lasted into the 2nd century BCE. From around 550 BCE, however, Carthaginian civilisation took over as the dominant influence, especially in the western Mediterranean. Carthage was the most famous Phoenician colony (most matters related to the Carthaginians continued to be known as Poeni or Punic after their Phoenician origins - such as the various Punic wars fought with Rome).

Along with trade in coveted luxury items, the Phoenicians were in demand as seamen and they also spread their knowledge of seamanship, navigation and (perhaps most importantly) the alphabet. This, obviously useful, mode of common communication between traders set up letter forms in various alphabets still obvious today (such as in the Greek and Latin alphabets) but also conventions such as reading right-to-left and horizontal text. It was also a purely alphabetic script (with 22 characters) rather than a pictographic or hieroglyphic script where symbols could represent ideas or things. The Phoenician alphabet (developed around 1050 BCE) did not represent vowels, however, only consonants so in modern terms is an abjad or abgad - where vowels are implicit or inferred. It was soon adopted by the cultures the Phoenicians came into contact with, such as the Greeks. Although the term alphabet comes from the first two letters of the Greek alphabet (*alpha* and *beta*), it is obvious that that order came itself from Phoenician where the first letters were *alep*, *bet*, *giml*, *dalt* - the first four letters in many derivative alphabets ('c' took the place of 'g' in alphabets from the 3rd century BCE onwards).

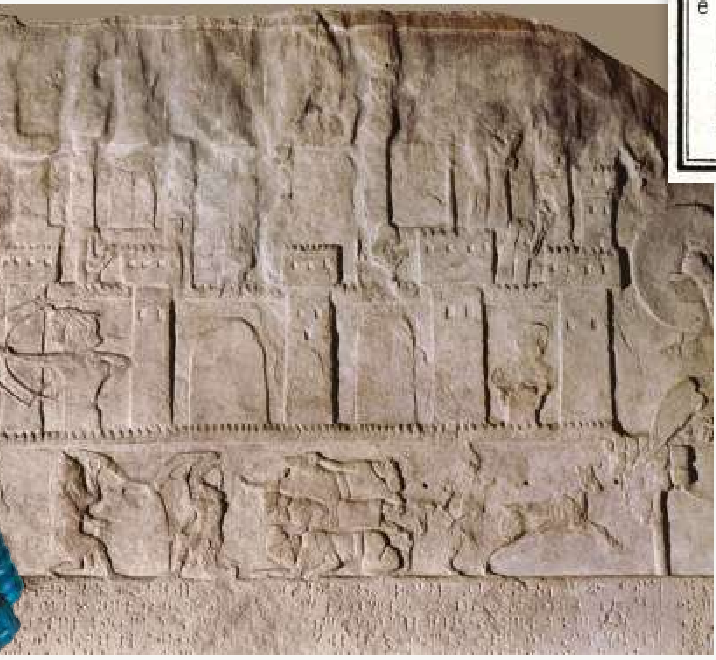
> "The Phoenicians spread their knowledge of seamanship, navigation and the alphabet"

In seafaring terms, the Phoenicians may also have been the first to develop the keel, and the bireme (a ship with two banks of oars) in around 700 BCE - an innovation from earlier designs of ship which only had one bank of oars. They are also credited with the invention of the trireme (three banks of oars) - according to Clement of Alexandria invented by the Sidonians. The trireme came to dominate naval warfare for more than 500 years.

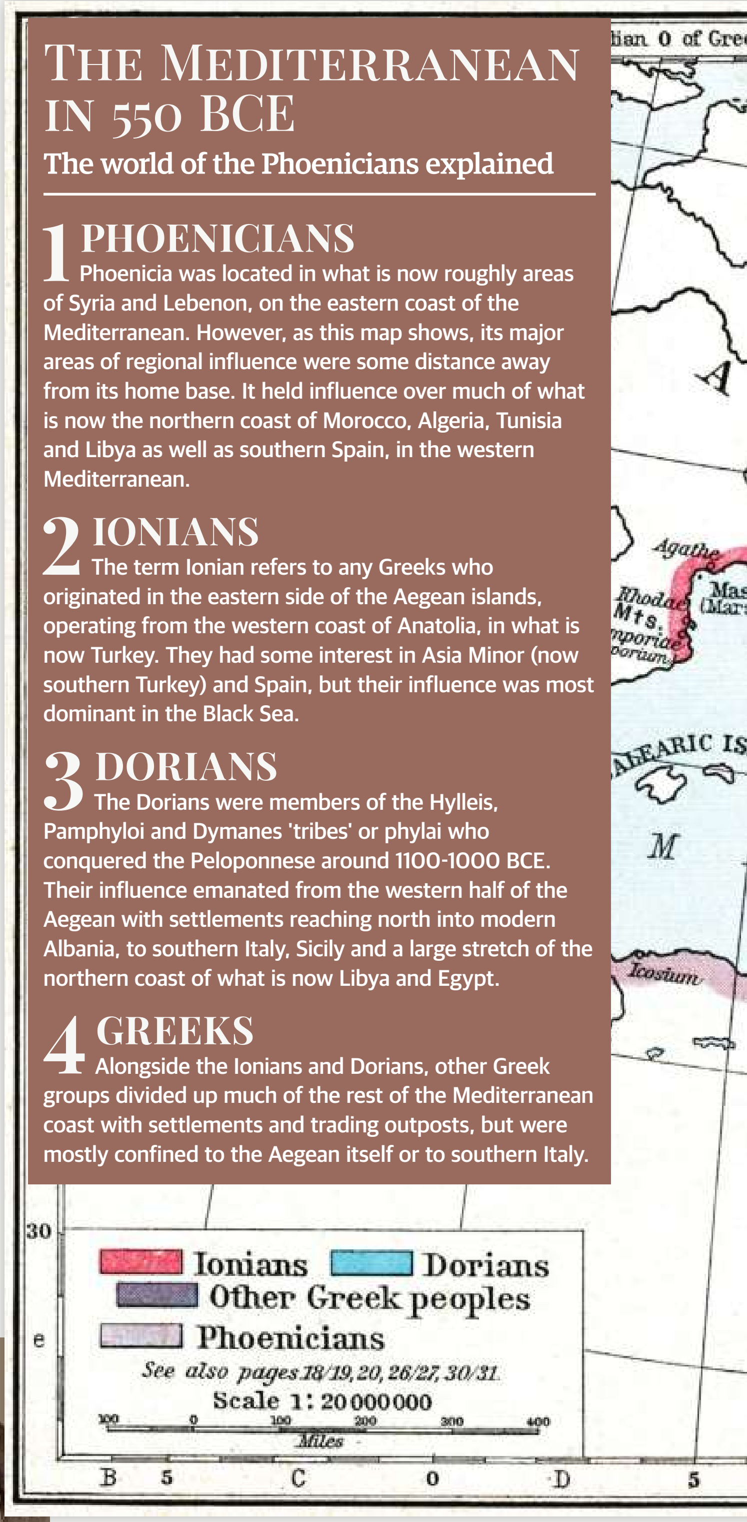
ORIGINS

The origins of the Phoenicians stretch back to around 3000 BCE, and they may have been part of the older indigenous Canaanite civilisation - although they soon became distinct and were regarded, and regarded themselves, as such. Exactly where the distinctions lie within terms like Phoenicians, Canaanites and the various biblical peoples is still a matter of debate. The Greek historian Herodotus, writing in the 5th century BCE, refers to all people of the area (which he broadly identifies as Palestine) as Syrians, Arabs or Phoenicians only and makes no further distinctions - he, therefore, identifies ancient Judeans as Phoenicians although many others do not. What we identify as Phoenician culture came into being in around the 12th century BCE. This corresponded to the period when previously dominant Late Bronze Age cultures (such as Mycenaean Greece and Minoan Crete) collapsed. This was due to various factors and, for the land which would become Phoenicia, the most important collapse was that of the Hittite Empire which had, at its height, covered most of Anatolia from the Black

LEFT-INSET A Phoenician glass bead depicting a bearded face. Phoenicia was a centre of glass making and glass-making technology



LEFT Relief of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III showing his attack on a Phoenician city



THE MEDITERRANEAN IN 550 BCE

The world of the Phoenicians explained

1 PHOENICIANS

Phoenicia was located in what is now roughly areas of Syria and Lebenon, on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. However, as this map shows, its major areas of regional influence were some distance away from its home base. It held influence over much of what is now the northern coast of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya as well as southern Spain, in the western Mediterranean.

2 IONIANS

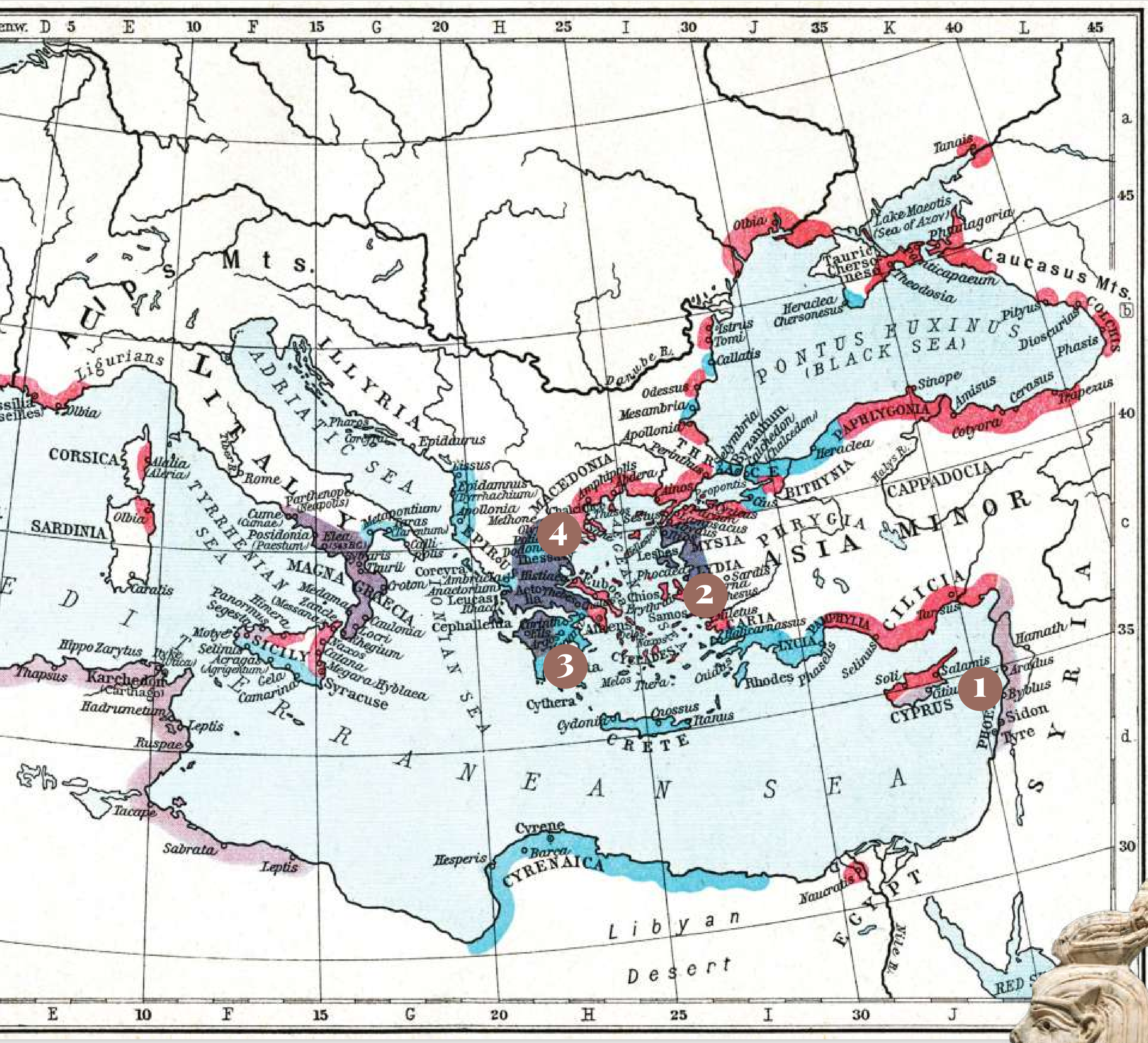
The term Ionian refers to any Greeks who originated in the eastern side of the Aegean islands, operating from the western coast of Anatolia, in what is now Turkey. They had some interest in Asia Minor (now southern Turkey) and Spain, but their influence was most dominant in the Black Sea.

3 DORIANS

The Dorians were members of the Hylleis, Pamphyloi and Dymanes 'tribes' or phylai who conquered the Peloponnese around 1100-1000 BCE. Their influence emanated from the western half of the Aegean with settlements reaching north into modern Albania, to southern Italy, Sicily and a large stretch of the northern coast of what is now Libya and Egypt.

4 GREEKS

Alongside the Ionians and Dorians, other Greek groups divided up much of the rest of the Mediterranean coast with settlements and trading outposts, but were mostly confined to the Aegean itself or to southern Italy.



1
2
3
4
PONTUS EUXINUS (BLACK SEA)
ADRIATIC SEA
TYRRHENIAN SEA
IONIAN SEA
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
ASIA MINOR
CILICIA
CYPRUS
CRETE
SICILY
SARDINIA
CORSICA
MAGNA GRAECIA
MACEDONIA
ILLYRIA
ITALY
CAPPADOCIA
PAPHLYGONIA
BITHYNIA
MYSIA
LYDIA
CARIA
LYCIA
CYRENAICA
EGYPT
SYRIA
Libyan Desert
Karchedon (Carthago)
Syracuse
Rhodes
Salamis
Aradus
Byblus
Sidon
Tyre
Naucratis
Cyrene
Barca
Tanais
Olbia
Sinope
Trapezus
Phasis
Byzantium
Athens
Caucasus Mts.
Alps Mts.

Sea as far south as Byblos (modern Jebeil, Lebanon). Byblos was a city that would become an important Phoenician centre along with Sidon (modern Saida, Lebanon) and Tyre and, later, Aradus (Arwad, Syria). It was from Byblos that the Phoenicians traded papyrus from Egypt and gold from Nubia. Byblos was also an important centre for tin (essential for the creation of bronze – Byblos was also known for its bronze making) and lapis lazuli – sourced, ultimately, from Afghanistan. With the collapse of the Hittite Empire in the 13th century BCE, this created a power vacuum into which various states emerged (perhaps around 1230 BCE). We have evidence of the Hittites conquering the cities of Phoenicia in the 14th century BCE. Several of these were what became known as Phoenicia. Phoenicia was never, however, a single unified state. Rather, it was a collection of city states that were identified as homogeneous (they shared a language and culture) and distinct from other cultures in the area. This distinction was perhaps based on trade (although, as Herodotus shows, other distinctions were possible). Few Phoenician sources survive so we rely on outsiders (like Herodotus and other Greek writers) looking in. Each city had its own government – usually monarchies, although there is evidence of other systems too (such as priests, judges – *sufetes*, councils, even a commonwealth). These communities had also existed prior to the collapse of the Hittite empire – the earliest evidence of trade between Phoenicians and Minoan Crete dates back to the 15th century BCE at least. Other societies, Egyptian and Mycenaean Greek also have surviving inscriptions that refer to Phoenicia or Phoenicians. One inscription (the Honeyman Inscription), perhaps dating to around 900 BCE and found in Cyprus in the 1930s may refer ▶

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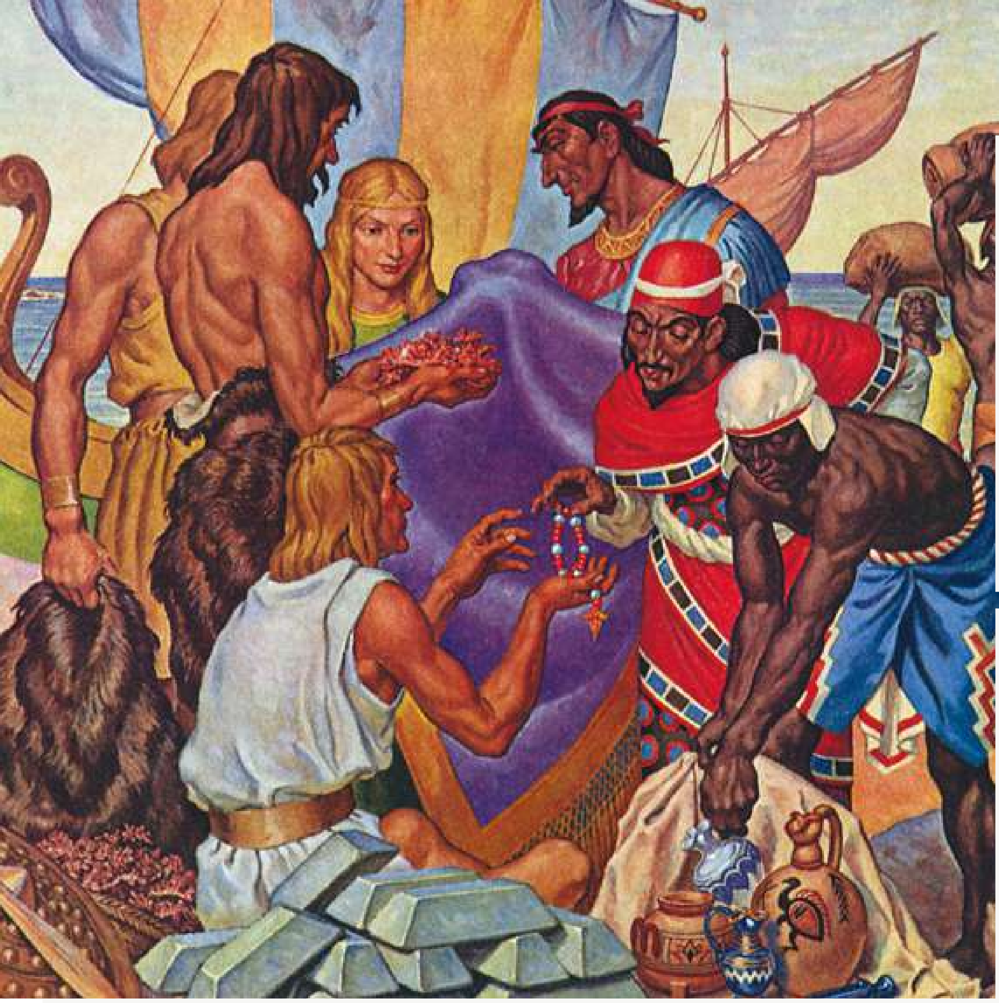

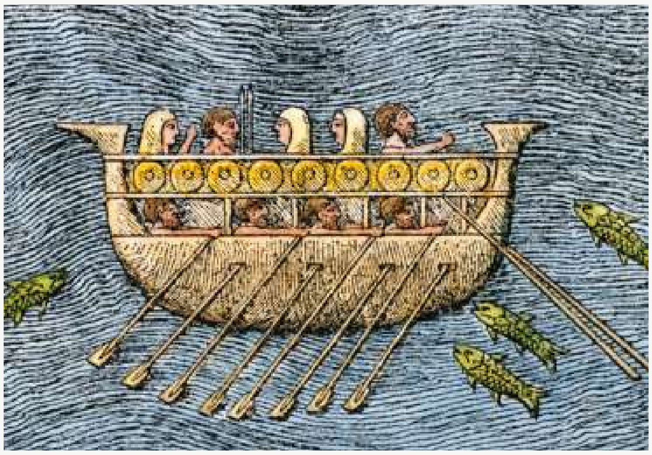

ABOVE-LEFT Trade was how the Phoenicians expanded their sphere of influence

TOP A woodcut of a Phoenician trading galley travelling to sell its goods

ABOVE Phoenicians offering tribute to the Persian king from reliefs at the palace at Persepolis

to Phoenicia as a whole as the land of "Put", but this interpretation remains controversial (and solitary). Replacing Sidon, Tyre became the most dominant Phoenician city in the 10th century BCE and (unusually) set out to conquer the other Phoenician states – this was not the normal pattern and, for the most part, Phoenician cities competed for influence and commercial dominance side by side in a less aggressive manner. Many of the colonies established by the Phoenicians are considered to have been done so peacefully rather than by conquest.

TRADE

From the cities and ports that came to be identified as Phoenician, the inhabitants began to develop and expand an extensive maritime trade network (sometimes even referred to as a thalassocracy – a maritime empire). Their networks included the entire coast of North Africa, even beyond the Pillars of Heracles (the Straits of Gibraltar) – perhaps to the Canary Islands and Britain, as well as Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica, the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts of Spain, and the Balearic Islands. They also traded northwards along the southern Anatolian coast including Cyprus and Crete, and they may even have traded into the Aegean Sea and southern Black Sea region.

In addition to Carthage (founded traditionally in 814 BCE by Queen Dido, and originally from Tyre – the name in Phoenician, *Qart-Hadast*, means "new town"), there were other important Phoenician colonies. These were usually established to be largely autonomous but were expected to pay tribute to their 'home' city. Tingi (originally Tyng, now modern Tangier, Morocco) was founded by the Phoenicians in the 10th century BCE – the name might relate to its location on high ground. Gadir (modern Cádiz, Spain) was founded perhaps in 1100 BCE although no evidence has been found dating to earlier than the 9th century BCE; the name in Phoenician meant "wall," "compound" or, perhaps, "stronghold." Dominance of many of the western Mediterranean Phoenician colonies were subsequently taken over by Carthage as she expanded her own influence and empire from the 7th century onwards. Other important Phoenician colonies included Leptis Magna (perhaps originally Lpq or Lpqy, now Khoms, Libya), founded in the 7th century BCE, and other places along the North African coast. Colonies were also established on Cyprus (Citium), Sicily (Motye, Panormus), Sardinia (Tharras, Sulci, Nora, Caralis) and on the Balearic Islands (Ibossim – the modern town of Ibiza).

In addition to local items such as the murex dyes, another mainstay of Phoenician trade was from the extensive local cedarwood forests, which provided wood that was in great demand throughout Egypt and Mesopotamia (the cedar tree still graces the national flag of Lebanon). Egyptian hieroglyphs (from the 15th century BCE onwards) refer to Phoenicia as "carpenters" (*fenekhu*) perhaps referring to it as one of the most important sources of useable wood for Egyptian construction.

In addition to producing their renowned dye, Phoenician cities also became famous for their own textiles dyed with it. These colourful fabrics are even mentioned in Homer's epic poem the *Iliad*. The Phoenicians also traded wine and extensive kilns have been discovered for making pottery to transport such products. Indeed, some credit the Phoenicians with the invention of the amphora itself, used for transporting wine and all sorts of liquids for centuries thereafter. Wine-making may even have spread from Phoenicia to other parts of the Mediterranean (although most cultures

– such as the Greeks and Romans – had alternative, usually divine, explanations of where the technology for making wine had originated). Phoenician colonies in North Africa, Sicily, France and Spain all had associated wine-making facilities. The remains of a Phoenician trading ship with 50 amphorae of wine was found off Gozo, Malta, in 2014 – one of the oldest Mediterranean shipwrecks (other Phoenician shipwrecks that provide evidence of the wine trade were found in Israel in 1997).

Olive oil exports and trade were also a staple of Phoenician connections and Phoenicia may also have been responsible for spreading glass-making technologies and innovations throughout the Mediterranean; Phoenicia was the glass-making centre of the Mediterranean. These items were all indigenous but, as the lapis lazuli, gold and papyrus trade shows, Phoenician cities also traded in goods from elsewhere – it seems they had the networks to allow such goods to be traded far afield. Silver from Spain and Sardinia has been found in the 'home' cities of Phoenicia revealing this was a multi-directional system. The tin used in Byblos may have even been sourced in Cornwall.

DECLINE

Phoenicia began to decline in influence from the time of the Assyrian invasions in 858 BCE onwards, although the peoples are still identified in our sources (especially Greek ones) as Phoenician for some considerable time. The culture and trade contacts were also valued by their new overlords and the cities of Phoenicia were allowed some autonomy for many years – they continued to trade and send out colonising expeditions. Assyrian control was tightened in the 8th century BCE and the major cities of Phoenicia rebelled from Assyrian rule. In response, they were put under siege, taken and suppressed. Many of the Phoenician colonies (especially Carthage) soon became strong enough to survive and thrive on their own.

With the collapse of the Assyrian Empire and its replacement by the Babylonian Empire, the cities of Phoenicia continued to try and assert their independence – Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre for 13 years (c.587-574 BCE). In turn, the Babylonians were themselves conquered by the Achaemenid Persians and the cities of Phoenicia yielded to Cyrus the Great, and he granted them a great deal of autonomy once more. He also divided them into four vassal kingdoms (each owing tribute to Persia). These were centred on Arwad, Byblos, Sidon and Tyre.

> "The destruction Alexander visited on Tyre ensured the other cities of Phoenicia quickly surrendered"

The Phoenicians were highly prized by the Persian kings for their prowess in seamanship – they provided most of the ships in the Persian Mediterranean fleets. Sidon rebelled (independently) from Persian rule in the mid-4th century BCE – as punishment, the Persian king Artaxerxes III destroyed the city. Tyre then became the most dominant city in the region once again and it was for this reason Alexander the Great ensured that he took the city in a seven-month siege in 332 BCE. The destruction Alexander visited on Tyre (crucifying 2,000 and selling 30,000 into slavery) ensured the other cities of Phoenicia quickly surrendered.

With the death of Alexander in 323 BCE, the Phoenician cities fell under Seleucid rule (Seleucus was one of Alexander's commanders who inherited part of the empire). The lands of the Levant soon became the contested territory between the Seleucids and Ptolemaic Egypt. The Phoenician cities remained self-governing and maintained their trade contacts with colonies in the western Mediterranean but, as the focus of dynastic wars, the cities fell to various belligerents and the cities ceased to be regarded as Phoenician from the mid-2nd century BCE onwards. They were now considered cities of one or another of the empires that controlled them – Seleucid, Ptolemaic, or Armenian – when the Armenian empire took over the region in the 80s BCE. The whole region was then taken over by Rome systematically from the 60s BCE and incorporated into the Roman province of Syria. In a way, the cities of Phoenicia therefore outlasted their most famous colony, Carthage, which had dominated the western Mediterranean (and may even have circumnavigated Africa around 500 BCE) and become a powerful empire in its own right. This brought it into conflict with Rome and a series of wars were fought (from 264-146 BCE) that saw Rome emerge victorious and Carthage was destroyed – its former territories falling to Roman control. ○

BELOW Two Phoenician sarcophagi from Cádiz, Spain, probably imported from Sidon and showing the continuing connections with Phoenician 'home' cities

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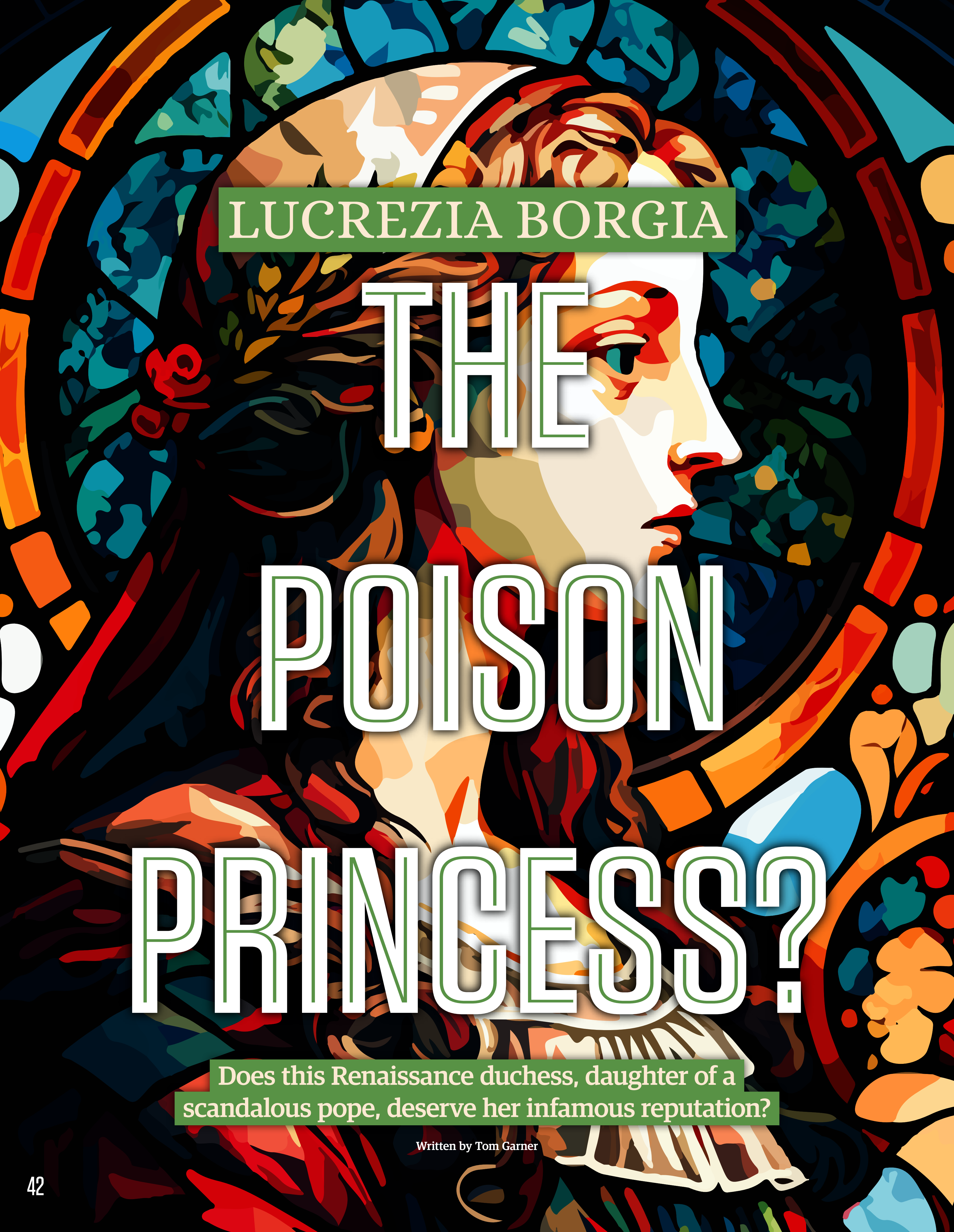
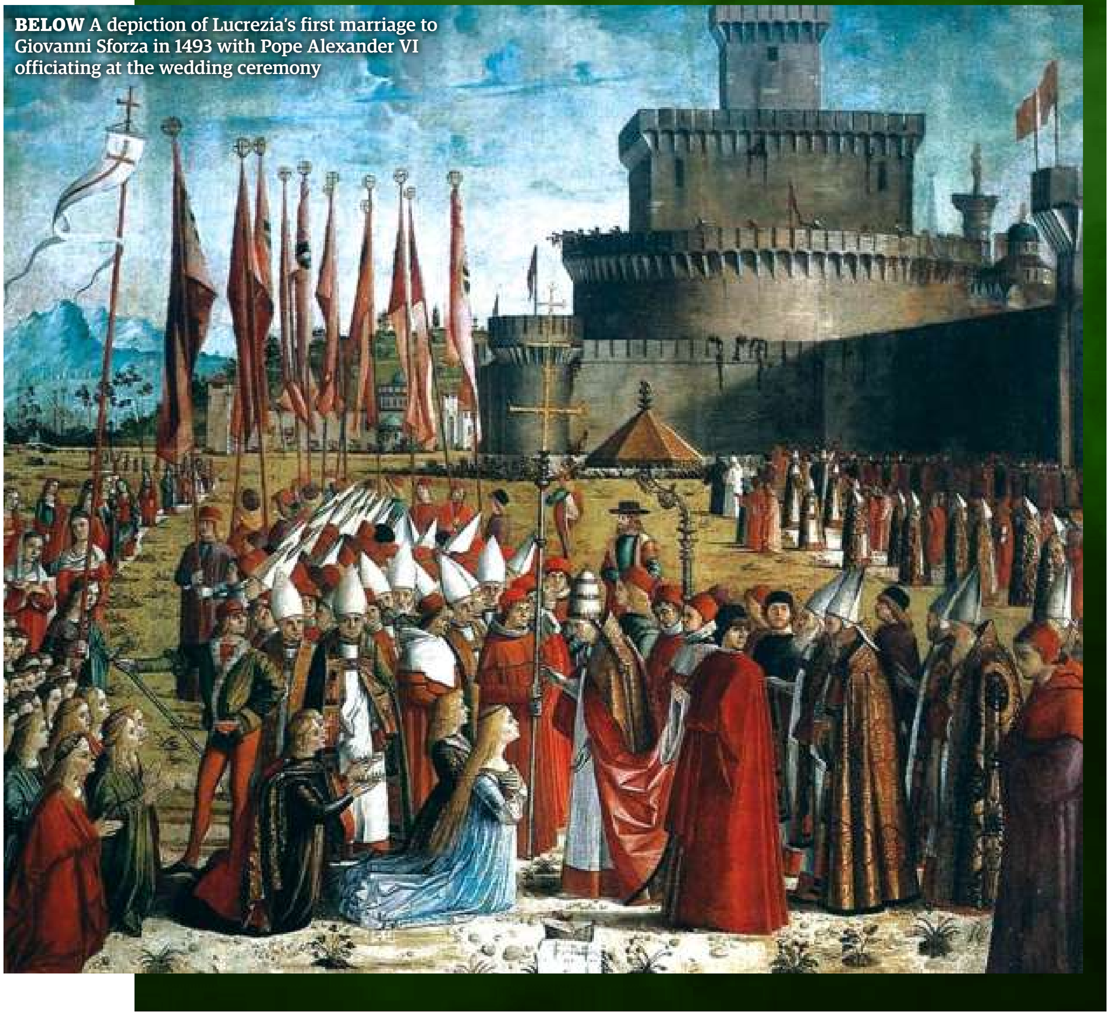


LUCREZIA BORGIA

THE POISON PRINCESS?

Does this Renaissance duchess, daughter of a scandalous pope, deserve her infamous reputation?

Written by Tom Garner



BELOW A depiction of Lucrezia's first marriage to Giovanni Sforza in 1493 with Pope Alexander VI officiating at the wedding ceremony

The word “Borgia” has come to define a particular kind of Renaissance decadence. Associated with sexual and violent scandals at the heart of the papacy, the Borgia family was dominated by three infamous figures, Pope Alexander VI and his two most prominent children: Cesare and Lucrezia.

Celebrated in her time as a beautiful young woman with long, blonde hair and a fair complexion, Lucrezia is often regarded as the original femme fatale. She is largely known today as a notorious figure, surrounded by rumours of incest, murders and even poisonings. However, is her infamy justified or has Lucrezia Borgia been wrongly maligned by history?

THE POPE'S DAUGHTER

A Spanish noble family, the Borgias rose to prominence in Italy when Cardinal Alfonso de Borgia was elected as Pope Callixtus III in 1455. Although Callixtus only reigned for three years until his death in 1458, Borgia influence in Rome continued under his nephew, Rodrigo Borgia. A cardinal like his uncle, Rodrigo was himself elected as pope in 1492 and took the regnal name of Alexander VI.

As the head of the Roman Catholic Church, popes were sworn to a vow of celibacy, but this held little meaning to the lascivious Alexander who had several mistresses. While serving as a cardinal, he had a long-term relationship with an Italian tavern landlady called Vannozza dei Cattanei. With Vannozza, the then Rodrigo sired four children during the 1470s-80s. Of the four children, three were boys (Cesare, Giovanni and Goffredo) while the third-born child was a girl: Lucrezia.

> “THANKS TO THESE PORTRAYALS IN POPULAR CULTURE, THE REAL LUCREZIA HAS BECOME BLURRED WITH HER DARK REPUTATION”

BELOW Holliday Grainger depicted Lucrezia in the Emmy-winning TV series *The Borgias* alongside Jeremy Irons who played Alexander VI

Born near Rome in 1480, Lucrezia was treated as a princess – despite her illegitimacy – and she received a superb education from the intellectuals of the papal court. Fluent in four languages, (Spanish, Italian, French and Catalan), Lucrezia could also read Latin and Greek and was proficient in music and literature.

Although she was highly educated, Lucrezia's primary purpose was to be married to a suitable nobleman to continue her family's ambitions. At the age of just 13, she was married in 1493 to Giovanni Sforza, Lord of Pesaro and Gradara. Theirs was not a love match and the marriage was annulled in 1497 on the grounds of Sforza's alleged impotence.

However, before the annulment, Sforza accused Lucrezia of incest with her father. This was the first of a series of scandalous rumours that were attached to Lucrezia. During the annulment process, it was also alleged that she had had an affair with Alexander's chamberlain, Pedro Calderon. The bodies of Calderon and a maid were soon found dead in the River Tiber in February 1498. Speculation abounded that her older brother, Cesare, had killed the pair in order to prevent Lucrezia being embroiled into further scandal. However, Sforza's original accusation against Lucrezia gained momentum.

One month after Calderon's death, an illegitimate child was born into the House of Borgia. Named Giovanni, the boy's parentage was unclear with many speculating that he was Lucrezia's son. The father's identification was open to wild rumours. It included Calderon but also – most scandalously – Cesare or Alexander VI. The truth cannot be fully known, although it is also likely that Giovanni's parents were Alexander and an unknown Italian woman.

CESARE AND ALFONSO

In the same year of Giovanni's birth, Lucrezia was married for a second time to Alfonso of Aragon, Duke of Bisceglie and Prince of Salerno. Unlike her marriage to Sforza, Lucrezia was reputed to be happy with Alfonso and gave birth to a son called Rodrigo in November 1499. However, their union would not last long – possibly thanks to the machinations of Lucrezia's older brother.

Cesare Borgia had originally been a cardinal but resigned his position to become a *condottiero* (mercenary leader) of papal armies in the service of both his father and King Louis XII of France against other Italian states. A ruthless man, he was ▶

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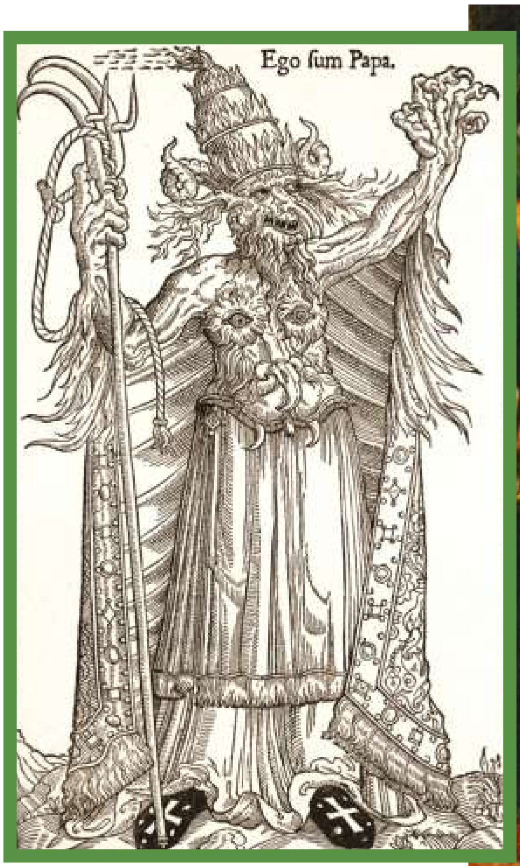
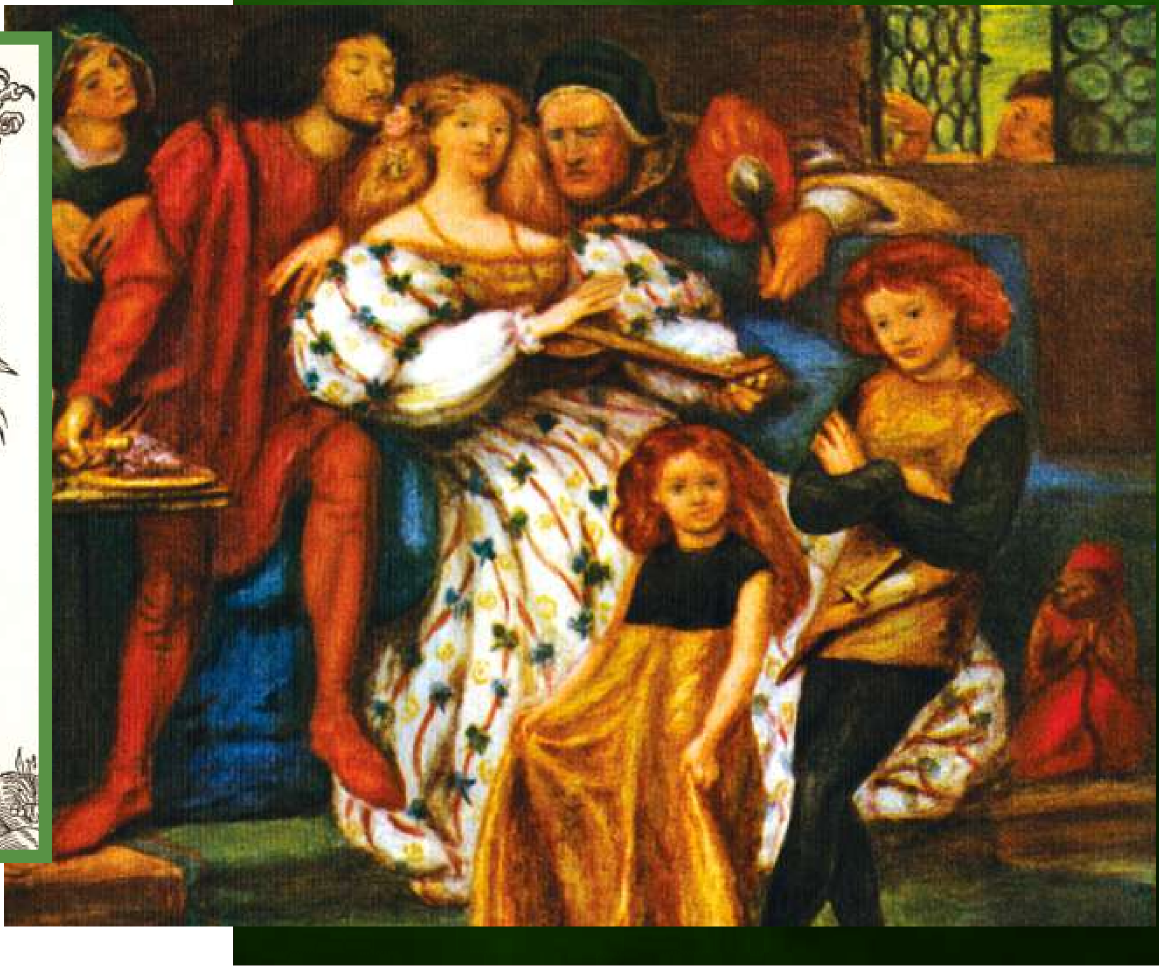

Ego ſum Papa.



also very close to his sister Lucrezia and may have become jealous of her marriage to Alfonso.

Already linked by rumour to Calderon's death, Cesare was again implicated when Alfonso was attacked and severely wounded in Rome in July 1500. Lucrezia nursed her husband but within a few weeks he was attacked again. Alfonso was strangled to death in his bed on 18 August 1500 by a Spanish *condottiero* called Micheletto Corella. Lucrezia had been talking to Alfonso when Corella burst in. The assassin distracted her by lying that her father needed to see her immediately and when Lucrezia returned home, Alfonso was dead.

It is likely that Cesare was behind Alfonso's murder while Lucrezia deeply mourned her husband. However, she could not grieve for long because Alexander soon arranged a third marriage with Lucrezia marrying Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara in 1502. This union was a marriage of convenience based on respect rather than love. Lucrezia bore Ferrara eight children, although both committed adultery with other partners.

BANQUET OF CHESTNUTS

In between her second and third marriage, Lucrezia was implicated in one of the Borgias' most infamous scandals known as the 'Banquet of Chestnuts'. Reputedly held in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace on 31 October 1501, the 'banquet' was actually rumoured to be an orgy hosted by Cesare. 50 'courtesans' (sex workers) supposedly entertained guests by dancing naked and picking up chestnuts from the floor. Alexander and Lucrezia were also rumoured to be in attendance, but the veracity of this event is questioned. The only account of the banquet was written by Johann Burchard, Alexander's papal Master of Ceremonies, but many historians consider the event to be implausible.

> "THERE WERE ALSO PERSISTENT RUMOURS THAT LUCREZIA OWNED A HOLLOW RING THAT SHE USED TO POISON DRINKS"

There were also persistent rumours that Lucrezia owned a hollow ring that she used to poison drinks, but this again is most likely simply an attempt by the Borgias' many enemies to discredit her and her family. Indeed, in the later part of her life Lucrezia was, by all accounts, almost a model of a Renaissance princess.

"PEARL ON THIS EARTH"

From 1503, Lucrezia's life changed considerably when her father died. Alexander's death deprived her of papal protection while Cesare was later killed in a skirmish in 1507. The power of the Borgias was seemingly broken, but Lucrezia was a canny political survivor. Alexander had appointed her as governor of Spoleto in 1499 and she had also effectively ruled the Vatican while her father was temporarily absent in 1501. In both cases, she had proven to be an intelligent ruler and this experience now served her well.

As Ferrara's wife, Lucrezia used her political experience to administer his duchy when he was away and she was a noted patron of the arts. Such was her success that a famous French soldier called the Chevalier de Bayard described Lucrezia as a "pearl on this Earth".

Lucrezia died on 24 June 1519 aged 39 from complications after giving birth to her tenth child. Overall, despite the bloodthirsty atmosphere she had grown up in, she had survived to become a respected noblewoman in the last years of her life. Nevertheless, the rumours about Lucrezia persisted long after her death and the infamy of the Borgias ensured she became a focus of interest to writers and artists.

BYRON, HUGO AND MORE

During the 16th century, the Spanish Borgias received hostility from Italian sources who viewed them as upstart

ABOVE-LEFT Pope Alexander VI was depicted as a devil for his scandalous behaviour in this Parisian broadsheet woodcut dating from c.1500

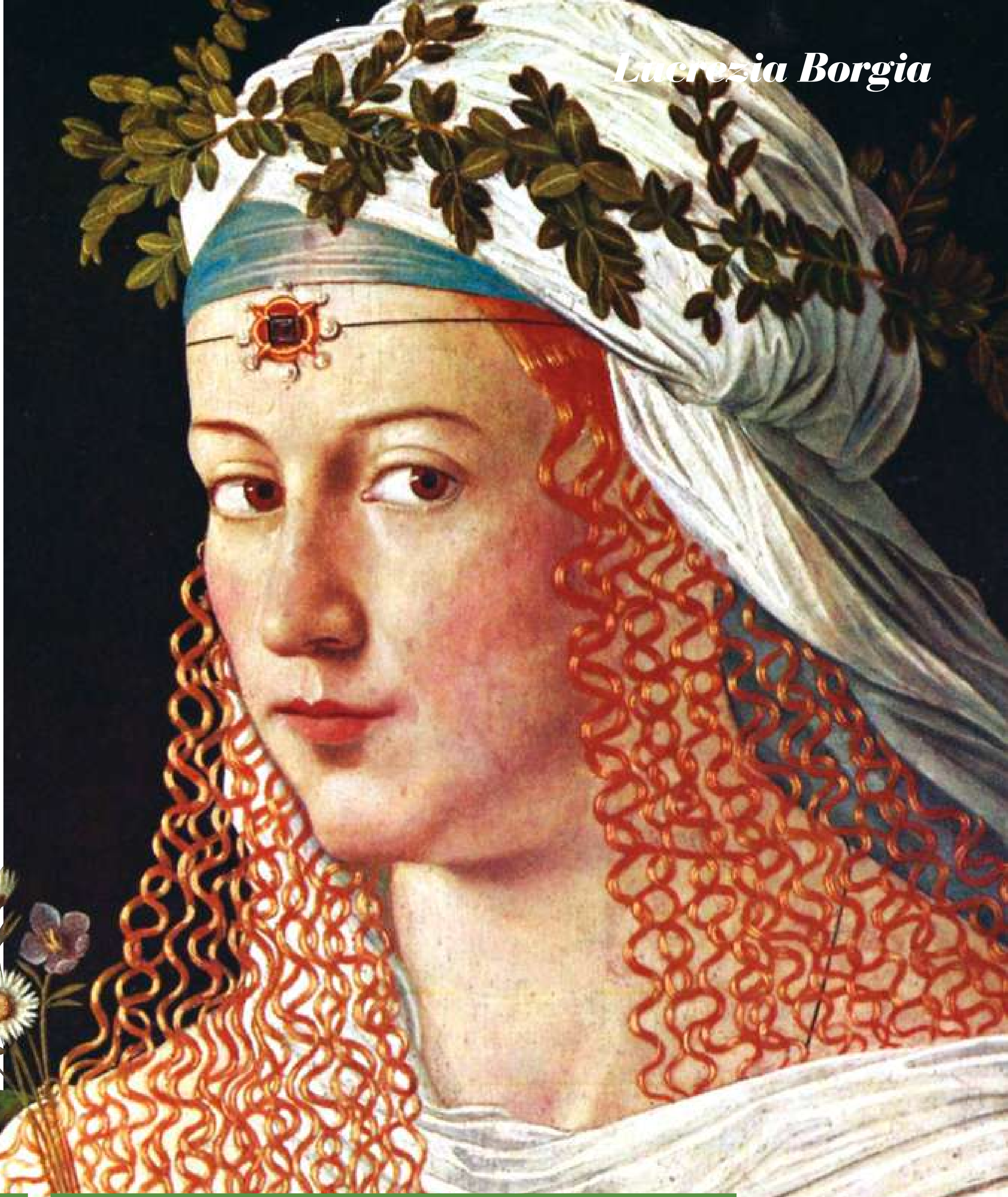
ABOVE-RIGHT An 1863 painting of the Borgias (with Lucrezia in the centre), thought to be depicting the family's scheming, murderous nature

BELOW Did Lucrezia really own a hollow ring like this one, to stealthily poison drinks? Or was this merely a malicious rumour?

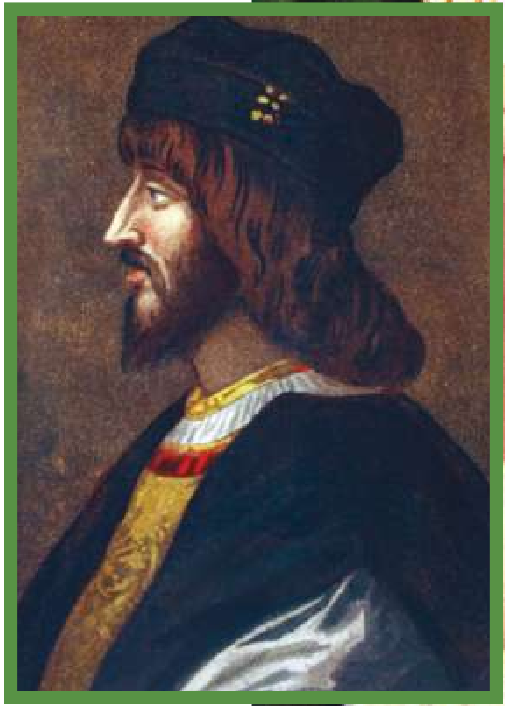
outsiders. Lucrezia in particular was not only an outsider but also a woman at the heart of the male-dominated papacy. This intrigued writers such as Victor Hugo who wrote a play about her in 1833, which was later adapted into an opera. The poet Lord Byron (himself no stranger to controversy) was so enamoured by Lucrezia's story that he reputedly stole a lock of her hair from a surviving letter.

The fascination with Lucrezia's supposed infamy continued with many novels written about her in the 20th century. She also began to be portrayed in films and television, where she was initially the subject of a German silent film in 1922. Over the next 60 years, she was portrayed in several films, with the majority portraying her as a scandalous figure. In the 21st century, Lucrezia has been a major character in the TV series *The Borgias* (2011-13) and even the 2010 video game *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*.

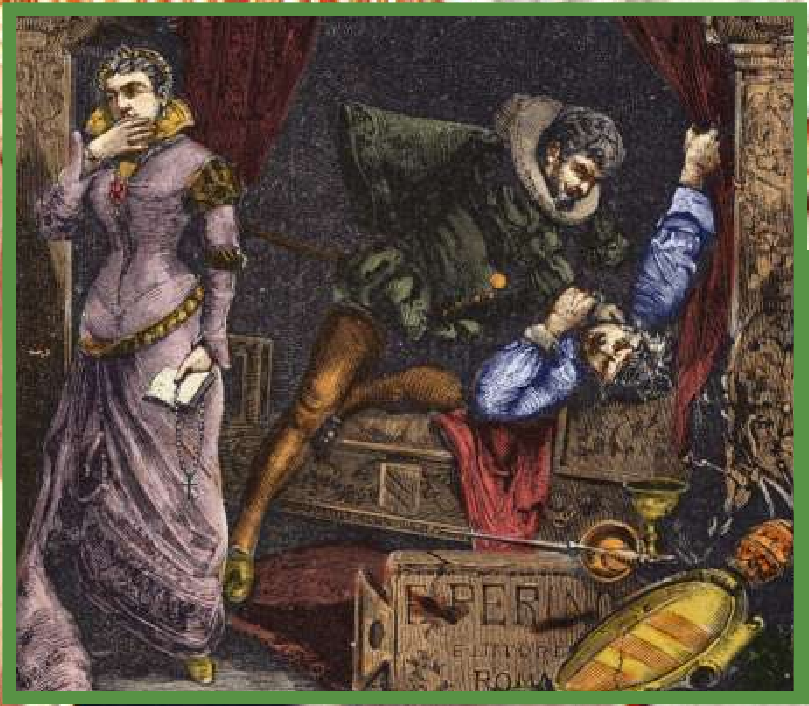
Thanks to these portrayals in popular culture, the real Lucrezia has become blurred with her dark reputation. However, there is ultimately no conclusive evidence that Lucrezia was guilty of the acts she was accused of. Instead, the evidence points to an intelligent, cultured woman who survived in a violent man's world that was full of danger. That she ultimately died as a respected pillar of Renaissance society indicates that she has more likely been the posthumous victim of malicious gossip and rumour that has lasted for centuries. ○



ABOVE Due to many scandalous rumours, Lucrezia has an infamous reputation



FAR-LEFT Cesare Borgia's political machinations were a major inspiration for the 1532 treatise *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli, who personally spent time with him



LEFT An assassin murdered Lucrezia's second husband, thought to be on Cesare's orders

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HUNT FOR THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

For centuries, tales of a wild man of the Himalayas have fascinated mankind, but is the Yeti fact or fiction?

Written by Callum McKelvie

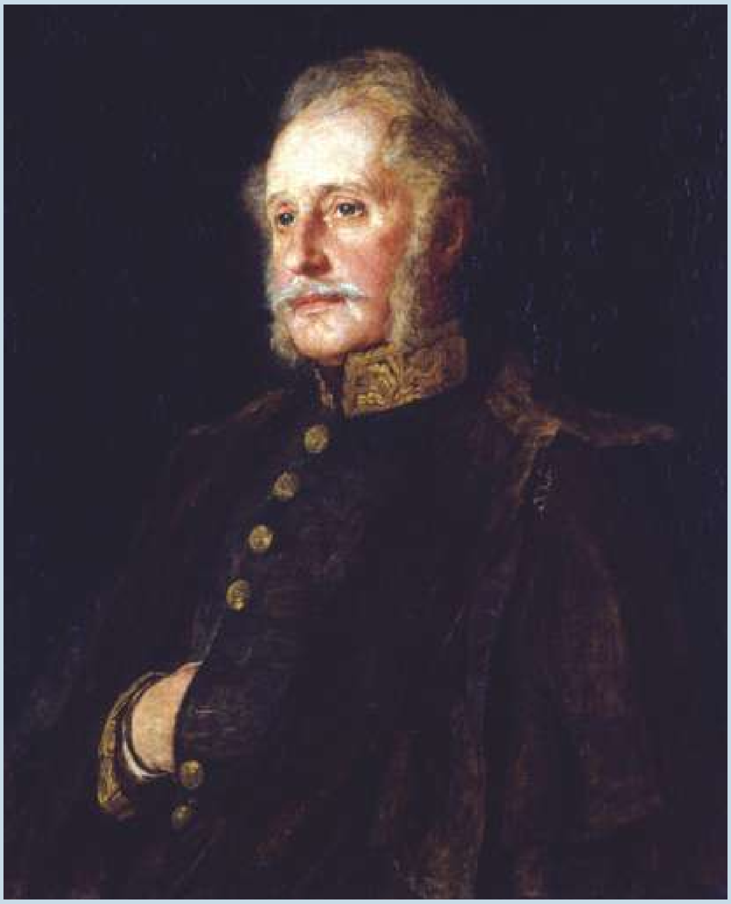
High in the Himalayas lurks a monster. A fearsome and rarely seen creature whose name has become legendary - the Yeti. Appearing first in Tibetan folklore, it was in the 1950s that stories of the Yeti, or 'The Abominable Snowman', quickly captured the public's imagination. Thanks to accounts of half-glimpsed figures and of strange footprints in the snow, expeditions to capture the beast were launched by everyone from famous mountaineers such as Sir Edmund Hillary, to British tabloid *The Daily Mail*. In the decades since, the mysterious creature continues to fascinate us and has inspired animated children's films, episodes of *Doctor Who* and even a Kate Bush song. In 2013 renowned naturalist and television presenter David Attenborough even went as far to state that he believed "the Abominable Snowman may be real." And yet, we still seem no closer to locating the beast. But where do stories of the Yeti come from? And are they fiction… or might there be a grain of truth in them?

"THE ROOF OF THE WORLD"

Stories of the Yeti first appear to originate in Himalayan myth. Part of the mountainous region of High Asia, often referred to as "The Roof of the World", for centuries the Himalayan mountains have fascinated mankind. Stretching across roughly five countries (Nepal, China, India, Pakistan and Bhutan) and 2,500km, the mountains are known for their extraordinary heights. The most famous of the formidable Himalayan Mountains is undoubtedly Mount Everest; ▶

at 29,029 feet above sea level it is the highest mountain in the world. Due to their high elevation, the Himalayas have a foreboding landscape covered with ice and snow and with many of the highest areas inhospitable to humans.

Perhaps it should not be surprising that such an unwelcoming place has given birth to stories of strange creatures wandering its snowy peaks. The folklore of the Himalayan peoples, including the Nepalese, Tibetans and Bhutanese, features three main different types of Yeti. These are the relatively small and benign Rang Shim Bombo, the Chuti which lives in many of the highest areas, and the giant and ferocious Nylamo. Other terms for the Yeti include 'Dremo' and 'Mi-Go', the latter meaning 'Wild Man'. According to Lee A Weiss in the article 'Man, Yeti, and Mi-Go' for the collection *The Transgressive History Of A Monstrous Word*, belief in the Yeti is "historically and geographically widespread throughout the Himalayas."



EARLY SIGHTINGS AND THE 'ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN'

By 1832, naturalist BH Hodgson had lived and worked in India and Nepal for 14 years, studying animal life. That year he submitted a report to the Asiatic Society of Nepal on the many mammals in the country. But within this document was a rather unusual and alarming anecdote. "My shooters were once alarmed in the Kachár by the apparition of a 'wild man'," Hodgson begins, going on to state: "They mistook the creature for a càcodemon or rakshas [demons], and fled from it instead of shooting it. It moved, they said, erectly [and] was covered with long dark hair." Considered by enthusiasts to be the first purported sighting of a Yeti, Hodgson himself thought that the creature was an orangutan. Although the IUCN's Species Survival Commission states that 20,000 years ago orangutans could be found all over Southeast Asia, including the Himalayas, it's unlikely that the indigenous peoples hired by Hodgson could have seen one in the 19th century.

"THE FOLKLORE OF THE HIMALAYAN PEOPLES, INCLUDING THE NEPALESE, TIBETANS AND BHUTANESE, FEATURES THREE MAIN DIFFERENT TYPES OF YETI"

Almost a century later, in 1921 the phrase 'the Abominable Snowman' was first coined. According to the *Smithsonian Magazine*, the name was the result of a translation error by a British journalist, Henry Newman. Working in Calcutta, Newman had heard whispers of a British expedition that had found something mysterious in the snow. The expedition, led by Lieutenant Colonel CK Howard-Bury, had uncovered a series of large footprints. Local folklore spoke of a 'Wild Man' and Newman, playing around with different translations and phrasing, soon coined the phrase 'The Abominable Snowman'. The term quickly caught on and became intrinsically linked with the mysterious creature.

Four years after Newman's clever turn of phrase, at the Zemu Glacier in the Eastern Himalayas in India, the photographer NA Tombazi gave perhaps one of the most evocative accounts of the creature. "The figure in outline was exactly like a human being," he began, "walking upright and stopping occasionally to uproot or pull at some dwarf rhododendron bushes. It showed up dark against the snow and as far as I could make out, wore no clothes."

THE 1950S AND 'YETI MANIA'

Despite such chilling encounters, it would be three decades before stories of the Yeti truly captured the public's imagination. In 1951, explorers Eric Shipton and Dr Michael Ward inadvertently lit the flame that launched 'Yeti Mania'. The pair were surveying possible routes to the summit, when at 15-16,000 feet they uncovered and photographed a number of unusually large footprints in the snow, placing an ice axe against one to demonstrate its formidable size. Shipton and Ward were not the first to report, let alone photograph such prints. In 1944 CR Cooke similarly photographed a number of footprints. Yet, Shipton's photographs became the quintessential evidence for the beast, with its vast size and unusual shape, and the media quickly leapt on the story. 'Yeti Mania' had begun.

It did not take long for an expedition to be organised with the specific intent of finding the creature. In 1954 the British tabloid *The Daily Mail* organised such an enterprise, which by their own admission cost the equivalent of £1 million today. The expedition was a huge undertaking, comprising a variety of experts including zoologists and some 370 porters. But their intent was not simply to study the beast, they sought to capture the creature and return it to London. If you think this sounds like something straight out of a science fiction B-movie, you would not be wrong as the expedition may have partly inspired the original teleplay that was adapted into the 1957 Hammer Horror film: *The Abominable Snowman*. However, unlike their cinematic counterparts, the 1954

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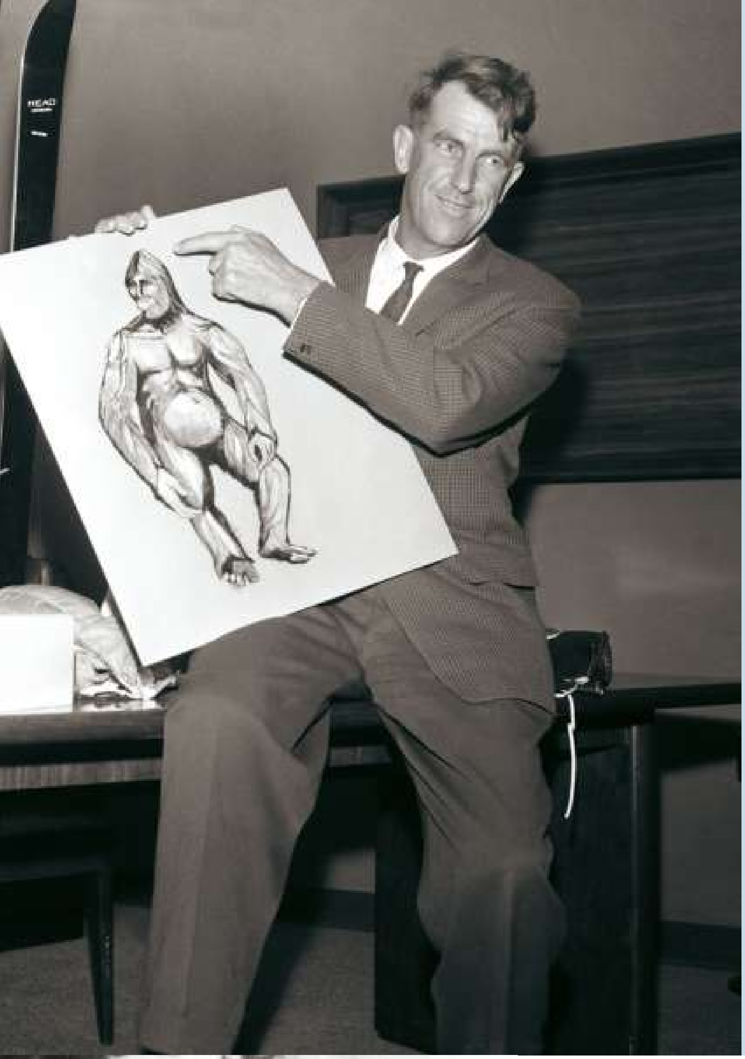

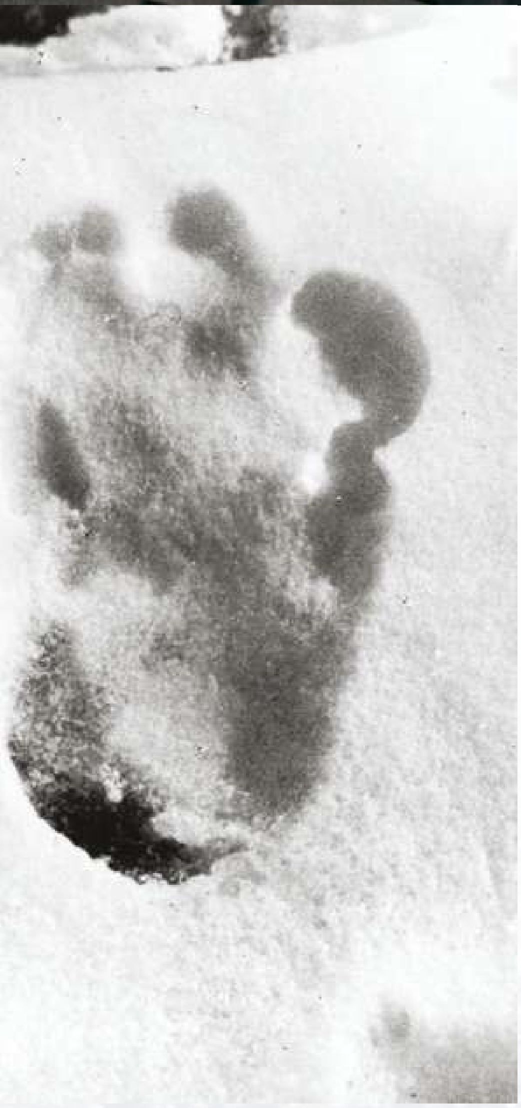

ABOVE-LEFT 19th century naturalist Brian Houghton Hodgson, one of the first to document a Yeti sighting

ABOVE-RIGHT Famed mountaineer Sir Edmund Hillary with a sketch of the Yeti at a press conference before his expedition to find the creature

LEFT Eric Shipton's famous 1951 photograph of a Yeti footprint, which inadvertently started 'Yeti Mania'

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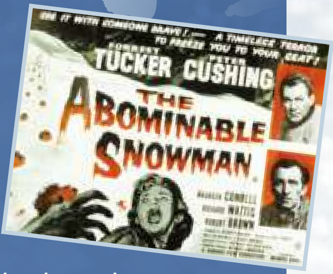
YETI MANIA!

How stories of the Abominable Snowman have dominated popular culture

THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

1957



Based on a television play by famed science fiction writer Nigel Kneale, this 1957 Hammer film was one of a number of 1950s B-movies that brought the snowman to the silver screen. However, unlike its contemporaries (such as 1954's *The Snow Creature*) this is a genuinely chilling and intelligent examination of not only the Yeti myth but also those who go searching for such a beast, with lead performances by Peter Cushing and Forrest Tucker and superb direction by Val Guest.

DOCTOR WHO – THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMEN & THE WEB OF FEAR

1967 & 1968

The adventures of the time travelling Time Lord have seen him face a variety of monsters including Daleks, Cybermen and even the Loch Ness Monster. However, in 1967's *The Abominable Snowmen*, Patrick Troughton's Second Doctor ventured to the Himalayas where he fought an army of robot Yetis controlled by a malevolent force known as The Great Intelligence. The following year the rampaging robots attempt to invade London via the Underground train system, in *The Web Of Fear*.

RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER

1964

HAPPY HOLIDAYS
2014

American animation studio Rankin/Bass (who also produced the 1977 animated *Hobbit* film and 80s Saturday morning classic *ThunderCats*) struck gold with this 1964 TV special. In expanding the classic story of Rudolph, a character who could function as an antagonist was required. Given the popularity of the Abominable Snowman during the late 1950s and 1960s, the team created a snow monster to plague Rudolph - known as 'Bumble'. The special was so successful that it has been repeated yearly since its initial broadcast.

KATE BUSH – WILD MAN

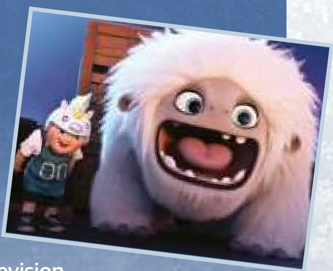
2011

50 Words For Snow
Kate Bush

It should perhaps come as no surprise that the quirky British singer, Kate Bush, perhaps best known for her 1985 hit *Running Up That Hill*, wrote a melancholic ode to the beast of the Himalayas. *Wild Man*, released first as a single and then included on the album *50 Words For Snow*, was declared by NME as "her strongest single in decades." As well as being a meditation on man's obsession with the snow creature and a melancholic lament on the loneliness of such a being, it also succeeds as a catchy little pop hit.

ABOMINABLE

2019



This 2019 DreamWorks film presented a heartwarming tale of a group of young children who discover a Yeti and attempt to keep the beast safe from a rogue zoologist. With an all-star cast including Chloe Bennet, Albert Tsai, Tenzing Norgay Trainor and Eddie Izzard, the film was a financial and critical success and saw a follow-up television series released in 2022. However, the film was banned in a number of territories for showing a map that portrays China's disputed claims in the South China Sea.

expedition were not hunted by fearsome monsters – in fact, they found very little.

However, the *Mail* expedition did return with a small collection of hairs. The hairs were purportedly from the Pangboche monastery, which was reputed to have on display both a Yeti scalp and also a Yeti hand. They were not alone either, according to a 1961 article in *LIFE* magazine, Yeti 'relics' could also be found in the monasteries of Khumjung and Namche Bazar. However, according to Bernard Heuvelmans in his famous *On The Track Of Unknown Animals*, the latter was quickly discovered to be a crude facsimile, constructed out of "pieces of similar hairy skin sewn together in the required shape."

TOM SLICK AND THE MYSTERY OF THE PANGBOCHE HAND

A few years after the *Daily Mail* expedition, the Pangboche Hand became the centre of one of the most lurid stories associated with the Abominable Snowman. In 1957, one unlikely individual with an interest in the ongoing hunt for the Yeti was Texas oil tycoon and billionaire, Tom Slick. His father had made his fortune in the oil fields of Oklahoma and when he died when Tom was just 14, the young man became extremely wealthy. Slick's interest in the monstrous and mysterious seems to have began when he was a student at Yale as, during a trip to Europe, he enquired after the Loch Ness Monster – though saw nothing. Later in life he would also arrange hunts for such famous legendary creatures as Bigfoot and less known monstrosities such as the Orang Pendek of Sumatra and the giant salamanders of Trinity Alps, Northern California.

However, of all the oil tycoon's monster hunts, it is the search for the Abominable Snowman for which Tom Slick remains most known. In 1957, Slick and his companions discovered even more of what were thought to be Yeti footprints, hair and even excrement. Spurred on by this discovery, Slick funded an even larger expedition the following year, which spent time studying the aforementioned Yeti scalps and hand.

In 1958, Peter Byrne had heard stories of the Pangboche Hand and made his way to the monastery on behalf of Slick. Byrne knew that such an artefact would be priceless if he could get it returned to the United States and scientifically verified. According to Byrne's own account when the monks refused, he made a bargain – he would take a single finger in return for a donation of tens of thousands of rupees (purportedly only around $160 today) and he would also replace the missing finger

COUSIN BIGFOOT?

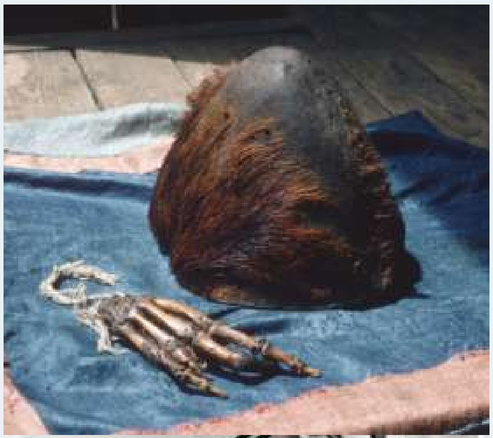
In the wilds of North California lurks a mysterious ape-like creature, a cousin of the Himalayan Yeti?

The Yeti is not the only mysterious entity that fascinates cryptid fans and cryptozoology enthusiasts. In the wilds of Northern California there is rumoured to live a huge ape-like creature – the Sasquatch, also known as Bigfoot. In 1811, David Thompson, a fur-trader and explorer, uncovered a series of large, mysterious footprints that those with him stated positively were not made by a bear.

Similarly to the Yeti, it was in the late 1950s and early 1960s that the legend of the Sasquatch truly caught the public imagination. Bluff Creek, California soon became a place associated with the creature; in 1958, a series of huge footprints were discovered there – later confessed to have been a hoax. But the most famous piece of Bigfoot evidence was taken in 1967 when Roger Patterson and his friend Bob Gimlin caught the mysterious creature on film. The film remains controversial and numerous individuals have sought to discredit it.

But like the Yeti, Bigfoot continues to be debated, demonstrated by researcher and author John Green compiling a list of an astounding 1,340 sightings of the creature throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

BELOW Members of the 1954 *Daily Mail* expedition traverse the Himalayan landscape



with a human one. But this is only one version of the story and others, reported by Trafficking Culture, suggest that the finger was taken illicitly.

But whatever the case, Slick and Byrne now faced another problem. How to get the finger out of Nepal? Enter famed Hollywood actor James Stewart, perhaps best known today for his collaborations with master of suspense Alfred Hitchcock in films such as 1948's *Rope* and 1958's *Vertigo*. Stewart was in Calcutta with his wife at the time and Byrne was told by Slick to make his way there and entrust the finger to Stewart. The plan was for Stewart to smuggle the finger to the United Kingdom, where a friend of Slick would be able to submit it to various tests to verify its authenticity. In order to further avoid suspicion, Byrne claims that the finger was secreted in Mrs Stewart's lingerie case.

What happened upon the finger's arrival in the United Kingdom remains a mystery. If indeed it was tested, then the findings were not made public. In the 1990s a tiny portion of finger was rediscovered and became the subject of an episode of the American documentary series *Unsolved Mysteries*. But shortly after the broadcast, the remainder of the hand was purportedly stolen from the Pangboche monastery. In 2008, another finger fragment was discovered and in 2011 was submitted for testing by the BBC. After decades of speculation it was discovered that the bones were in fact human bones. The final bizarre twist in this story took place the same year when mountaineer Mike Allsop presented the Pangboche monastery with a replica hand created by Weta Workshop – the team who created the special props for Peter Jackson's *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy.

THE SILVER HUT EXPEDITION

One of history's most famous mountaineers is undoubtedly Edmund Hillary who, along with Tenzing Norgay, became one of the first men to stand on the summit of Mount Everest, as part of Sir John Hunt's gigantic expedition to the mountain's peak in 1953. A mere eight years later, Hillary was leading the Silver Hut expedition to the Himalayas, this time to hunt for the enigmatic snowman, although he himself was sceptical. Nonetheless, Hillary still took a number of precautions, including what he described as "a gun that shoots a hypodermic syringe." Although he returned with yet another purported Yeti scalp, the expedition failed to convince the famous mountaineer. At a press conference Hillary stated: "I have never believed in the existence of the snowman," and claimed that they had "found rational explanations for most Yeti phenomena."

But what of the mysterious footprints that had sparked Yeti Mania in the first place? In a 1961 article in *LIFE* magazine, Hillary stated that contemporary discoveries meant that "we know that a Yeti track can be made by the sun melting the footprints of a small creature such as a fox or wild dog," going on to state that there's no reason why the same could not happen to "snow leopards, bears or even humans." In 2019, The Indian Army tweeted several images of footprints which some believed to be those of a Yeti. However, Daniel C Taylor (author of *Yeti: The Ecology Of A Mystery*) quickly debunked these notions in an interview with *The New York Times*. Taylor noted that the only creatures known to have made footprints that large were dinosaurs. As it's unlikely that dinosaur-sized creatures were stomping around the Himalayas unnoticed, Taylor suggests they were made by the Himalayan Black Bear.

> "HOW TO GET THE FINGER OUT OF NEPAL? ENTER FAMED HOLLYWOOD ACTOR JAMES STEWART"

THE HUNT GOES ON?

Today, the mystery of the Yeti continues to enthral. Like Bigfoot, The Loch Ness Monster and even lesser known cryptids such as The Jersey Devil, stories of the Abominable Snowman fill us with wonder and awe. The association of these creatures with foreboding or threatening landscapes (deep lakes, vast forests and mountains) perhaps goes some way to explaining their perseverance as ideas. Throughout history, supernatural or preternatural explanations have always been sought for mankind's anxieties about the world we live in. Perhaps then this is all the Yeti is? A fairy tale created and perpetuated to explain our fears and fascination with areas where it is difficult for humanity to tread. But of course, that's the sceptical explanation. The other answer is that, out there in the wilds of the Himalayas, a creature does exist. Some strange beast that has remained in hiding throughout the centuries and, perhaps, will continue to do so.

ABOVE-LEFT A Tibetan priest dressed as a Yeti

TOP-RIGHT The famous Pangboche Yeti scalp and hand, which were stolen from the monastery

ABOVE-RIGHT According to rumours, it was actor James Stewart who smuggled the Pangboche Yeti finger out of India

All images: © Getty Images, © Shutterstock

Great gifts of History

RATED

Great gifts of history… rated

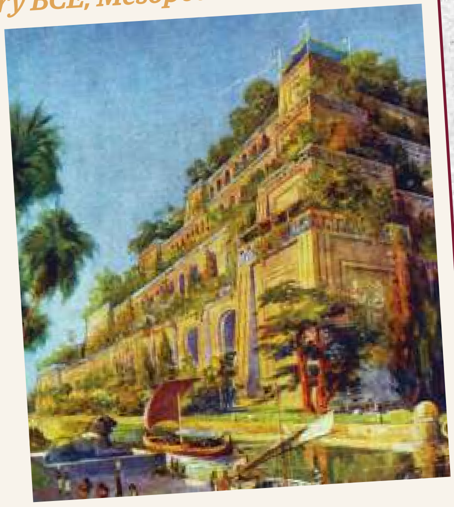
Were these notable presents of the past worth the wrapping paper?

Written by Jonathan Gordon

A gift is not just for festive seasons and personal landmarks. Over the years gifts have helped to create new bonds between nations, secure marriages, end wars or just strengthen relationships. And in the grand field of power politics, gifts can vary wildly, from small trinkets to entire provinces. Finding the right gift remains the challenge. So, here we review a dozen of the most famous gifts ever given and offer our verdict. Could you find some ideas for your own gift giving this year? Probably not.

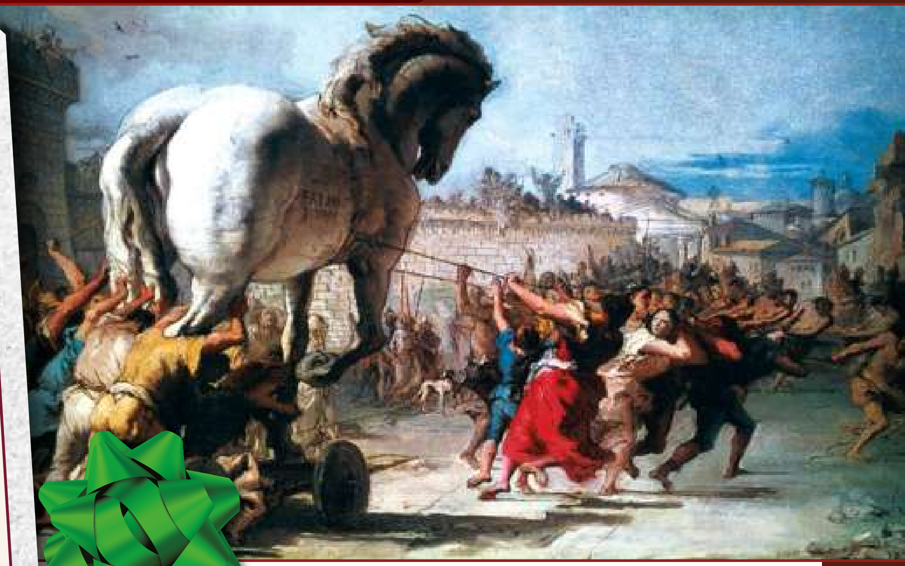
Hanging Gardens of Babylon

To: **Queen Amytis**
From: **Nebuchadnezzar II**
6th century BCE, Mesopotamia



The legendary Hanging Gardens were one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, built by Nebuchadnezzar II for his wife Amytis. It could be argued that this took buying flowers for your spouse a few stages too far, but it was actually a means to alleviate Amytis' home sickness. She is thought to have come from Media, around northwestern Iran, which was a lush and green land in comparison to the desert of Babylon. However, Dr Stephanie Dalley of Oxford University has suggested that the gardens were actually not in Babylon at all, but further north in Nineveh, built by King Sennacherib for his wife. Either way, an impressive floral arrangement with its tiered gardens and innovative irrigation system.

10/10



Trojan Horse

To: **The Trojans** From: **The Greeks**
13-12th century BCE, Troy

As gifts go, this might be the most famous in history and what a stinker it ended up being. Having laid siege to Troy for ten years, the Greeks decide to abandon the campaign and as a mark of respect for their foes, they left them a giant wooden horse, an offering to Athena. What's more, the Greeks had spared no expense, turning to master craftsman Epeius for the project. While we don't know exactly what the horse looked like, it was presumably handsome enough to encourage the Trojans to bring it within its impregnable walls. However, it was full of men, which under different circumstances might have been appreciated, but in this instance meant the Greeks could open the gates for Troy to be destroyed.

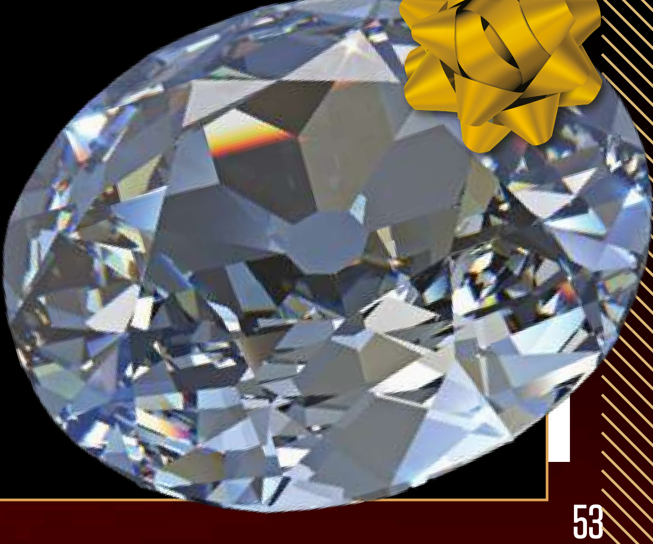
1/10

Koh-i-Noor Diamond

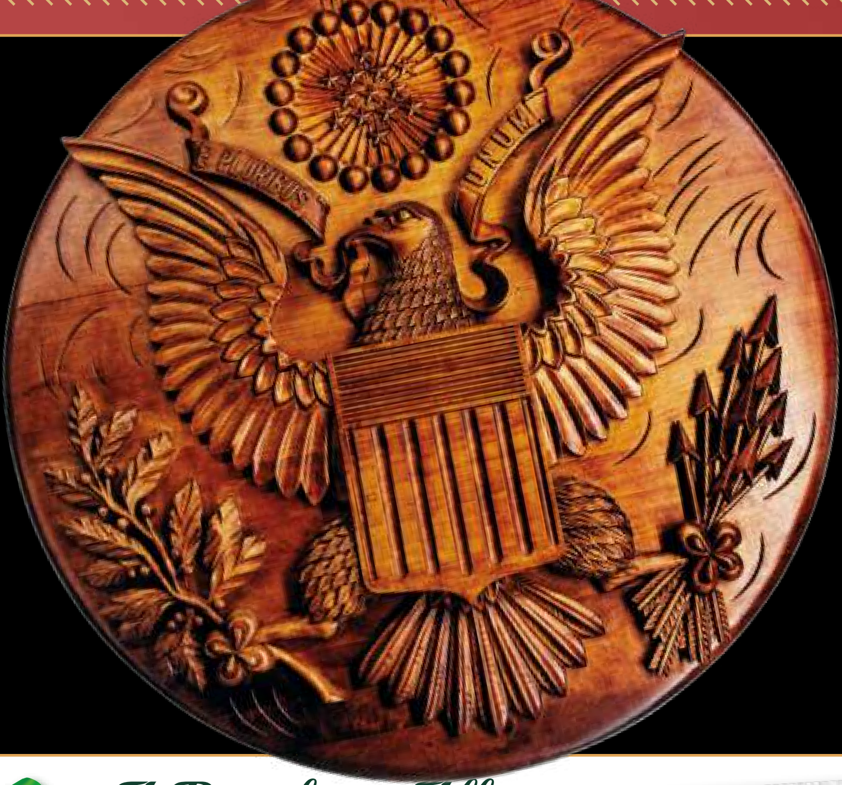
To: **Queen Victoria** From: **British East India Company**
3 July 1850

This famous diamond changed hands quite a few times before the East India Company took possession of it. Thought to have originated in central India, it was held by the Mughal rulers, then the Afsharid dynasty of Iran who invaded India from 1738, followed by the Durrani dynasty of Afghanistan in 1749 and then the Sikh Empire in 1813. The company became the latest conquering power to possess the gem after the Anglo-Sikh War (1848-49) when it confiscated all of the property of the crown, gifting the diamond to Queen Victoria. As a prize of conquest, the diamond could also be seen as a symbol of ownership of India itself, which is one of the reasons many would like to see it returned. Possibly worth as much as $400 million, it's a princely gift, but a complex one.

6/10



All images: © Getty Images, © Shutterstock



The Great Seal AKA The Thing

To: **The United States**

From: **The Soviet Union** *4 August 1945*

Like a Trojan Horse for the Cold War era, the Great Seal was a gift with a hidden surprise. Presented to US Ambassador Averell Harriman by a Soviet youth group called the Vladimir Lenin All-Union Pioneer organisation, the seal is a wooden replica of the Great Seal of the United States. The seal was hung in the library of the ambassador's residence, Spaso House, but it contained an innovative listening device. Only powered by external radio waves, it went undetected until 1952 after radio interceptors thought they were picking up conversations from the residence. Because it lacked a battery or any power source, it baffled experts who dubbed it 'The Thing' until it could be studied and explained.

2/10

A Bowling Alley

To: **President Truman**

From: **Missouri donors**

25 April 1947

As any regular gift buyers know all too well, getting something for someone who seems to have everything is a challenge. So, what do you get for the 63rd birthday of the President of the United States? Well, donors in his home state of Missouri thought a bowling alley in the White House would do the trick. Construction actually finished early (his birthday was in May). Trouble was, Truman was more of a poker man, and didn't use the alley much. It was even closed by his successor Eisenhower in 1955. However, it was a hit with the staff who formed a White House Bowling League in 1950. So, not a great gift for Truman, but it still got some appreciation in the end.

5/10

Resolute Desk

To: **President Rutherford B Hayes**

From: **Queen Victoria**

1880

Somewhat outdone by the French gift of the Statue of Liberty a few years later, the Resolute Desk given to President Hayes by Queen Victoria was no less sentimental. Made by William Evenden, it is a double pedestal partners' desk made from the oak of the HMS Resolute. The ship had been recovered and repaired by the Americans and returned to Britain having been trapped in the Arctic ice during an expedition. When it was decommissioned, Victoria had some of the wood used for the desk. The Resolute Desk has been used by nearly every president since. That being said, is office furniture a good gift?

4/10

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

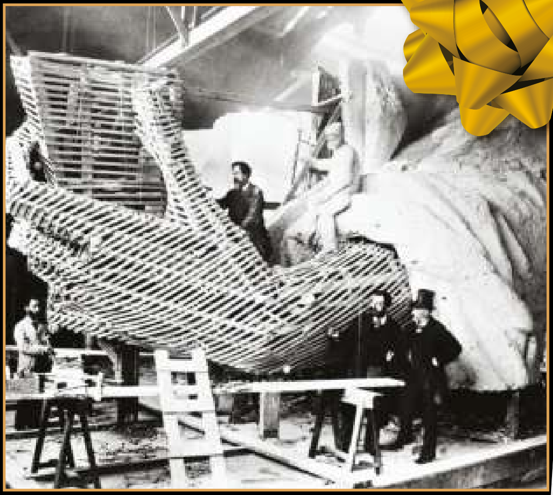
Two Pandas

To: **United States** *From:* **China**

16 April 1972

A good tip for buying gifts is to just pay attention to the things people talk about. What are they interested in? Do they have a new hobby? Do they have a zoo with an empty pen? Such was the case in 1972 when President Richard Nixon made his historic visit to China and the First Lady, Patricia Nixon, mentioned her love of pandas to Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. Two months later two giant pandas, named Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing, moved into the Smithsonian's National Zoo. It wasn't so successful for the pandas, but experts at the conservation institute learned a great deal about pandas as a result.

6/10



Statue of Liberty

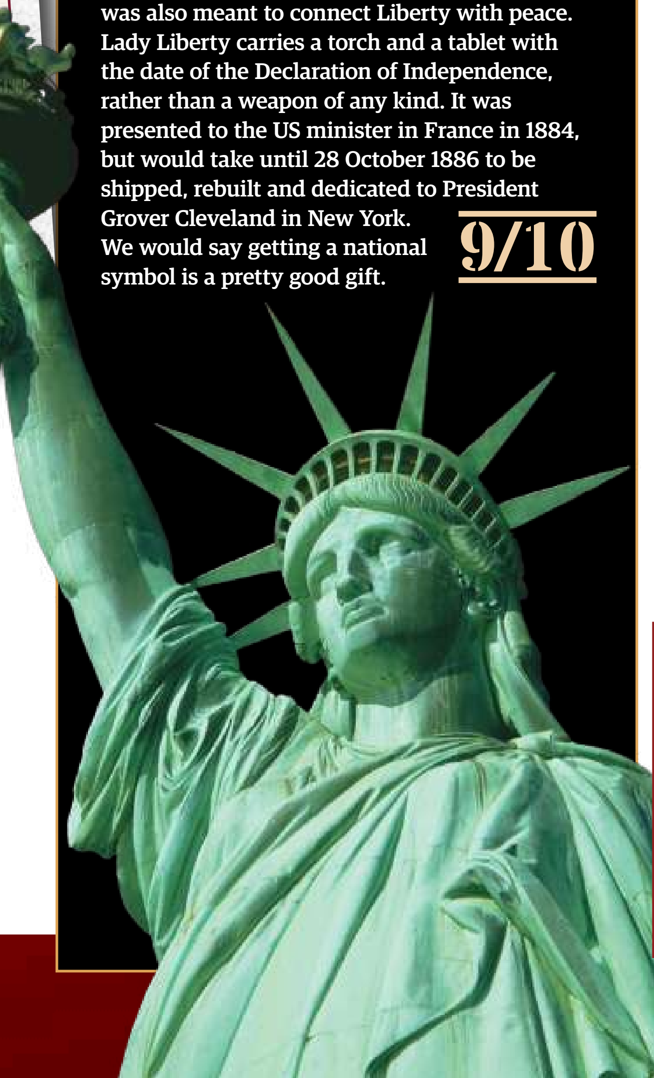
To: **The United States of America**

From: **France**

4 July 1884

Liberty Enlightening the World (as it was originally known) was the idea of French historian Édouard de Laboulaye who, in 1865, wanted to commemorate the close relationship between America and France from the Revolutionary War. It had a second purpose, however. Conceived in a time of upheaval and discontent in France itself, where shouts of Liberty were synonymous with revolution, it was also meant to connect Liberty with peace. Lady Liberty carries a torch and a tablet with the date of the Declaration of Independence, rather than a weapon of any kind. It was presented to the US minister in France in 1884, but would take until 28 October 1886 to be shipped, rebuilt and dedicated to President Grover Cleveland in New York. We would say getting a national symbol is a pretty good gift.

9/10



Taylor-Burton Diamond

To: **Elizabeth Taylor**

From: **Richard Burton**

1969

Elizabeth Taylor was well known for her extensive and impressive jewellery collection, but most of all she loved diamonds. She even ended up with two named after her. The second was a 69.42-carat, pear-shaped diamond originally mined in South Africa. Taylor and her husband Richard Burton decided to bid on it when it went up for auction, but lost out to Cartier, leaving Burton a "raving maniac" in his own words. Determined to make it theirs, Burton went to Cartier and bought it directly from them for $1.1 million. However, unlike diamonds, the marriage didn't last forever and Taylor sold the diamond in 1979, using the proceeds to build a hospital in Botswana, where she had remarried Burton in 1975.

7/10

Fabergé Egg

To: **Maria Feodorovna** *From:* **Alexander III**

1885

It's been suggested that the Romanovs were a bit out of touch with the common Russian. We'll refrain from making a firm statement on that accusation, but Alexander III did commission a pretty elaborate golden egg as an Easter gift for his wife. And then a second. Which then inspired a series of royal eggs, each becoming more elaborate and bejewelled. Created by Peter Carl Fabergé, the first egg is actually fairly modest compared to what followed (50 in total were made for the royal family) with its white enamel 'shell' and gold yolk, within which was a golden hen and then a replica of the imperial crown.

8/10

Weeping Cherry Trees

To: **Union Memorial Hospital, Baltimore** *From:* **Al Capone**

1939

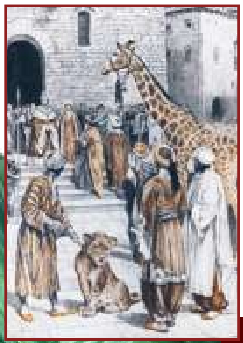
Eight years into his 11-year sentence for tax evasion, Capone was diagnosed with neurosyphilis and was granted early release. His family tried to get him admitted to John Hopkins University Hospital, but their board refused. Union Memorial Hospital, however, welcomed him, giving him the entire fifth floor to himself as security. After six weeks, followed by outpatient care, he was so grateful, he gifted the hospital two Japanese cherry trees, one of which still stands.

7/10

Giraffe

To: **Lorenzo de' Medici** *From:* **Al-Ashraf Qaitbay**

1487



In Renaissance Florence, there were few men who had more than Lorenzo de' Medici. Even so, that the sultan of Egypt would go to the trouble of shipping a giraffe to the Florentine lord, an animal also not even native to his own lands at the time, was quite a gesture. Florence had been on good terms with Egypt since a commercial treaty in 1422, but with conflict rising in the region, Sultan Qaitbay wanted to secure the support of Italy's premier family. Giving them the first giraffe to be seen in Italy since the days of Ancient Rome was a pretty impressive move.

8/10

William Still
SHEPHERD of EMANCIPATION

The remarkable story of how William Still helped hundreds of men, women and children escape from slavery

Written by Andrew Diemer

In the 19th century, the Underground Railroad was a vital collective effort to aid fugitive slaves in their flight to freedom. In early 1856, William Still, by that point perhaps the organisation's most important figure, penned an extensive letter to a friend and ally in Canada named Mary Ann Shadd, in which he reflected on his work. "In a few words, let me say that the Underground Railroad cause is increasing," he wrote, in a letter that would be subsequently published in Shadd's *Provincial Freeman*. "The slaves, from the youngest to the oldest, have of late years got a thirst for liberty, and they are bound to have it, come what may." Much of the work of the Underground Railroad was, out of necessity, secret, but by the late 1850s, Still was confident – not just in the justice of the struggle against slavery, but in its inevitable triumph. He was not afraid to tell the world about it.

EARLY LIFE

Still was the youngest of 18 children, born in 1821 to parents who had both been enslaved in the state of Maryland. His father, Levin, was able to save enough money over the years to purchase his freedom. Still's mother, Sidney, however, was unable to secure her freedom legally and so she ran away – twice. After the first escape she was captured and dragged back into bondage, along with her four children. The second time she ran away she made the heartbreaking decision to leave behind her two eldest children, boys named Levin and Peter. She changed her name to Charity, and she and Levin settled in a remote, rural area of the free state of New Jersey. William Still was born many years after this escape from bondage, but he grew up with a clear understanding of the damage that slavery had done to his family.

He grew up working on his father's farm, but as a young man Still was drawn to the nearby city of Philadelphia, and in his early twenties, he moved to the city looking for work. While such work was difficult to come by at first, Still did find a thriving and supportive community of free Black people in the city. After a few years of irregular work, in 1847 he was finally hired as a clerk at the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. Before long Still would also become the leader of the city's Vigilance Committee, an organisation committed to protecting fugitives from slavery and helping them in their flight to freedom – the organisational heart of the eastern portion of the Underground Railroad. Still ran the Vigilance Committee out of his office at the Anti-Slavery Society. ▶

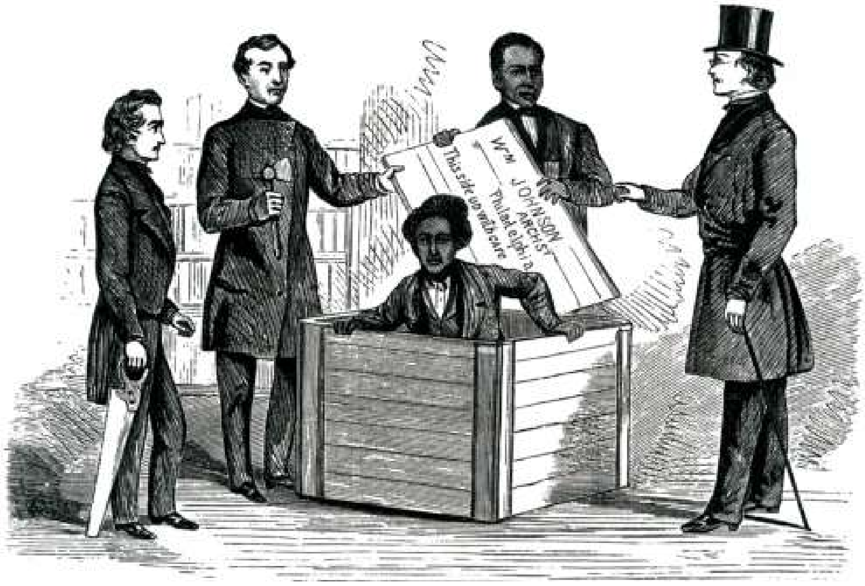
> "Still was confident – not just in the justice of the struggle against slavery, but in its inevitable triumph"

© Alamy

EXPERT BIO

ANDREW DIEMER
An associate professor of history at Towson University, Andrew Diemer is the author of *Vigilance: The Life Of William Still, Father Of The Underground Railroad* (2022) and *The Politics Of Black Citizenship* (2016).

AN ESCAPE IN A BOX



ABOVE Illustration showing the escape of Henry Box Brown

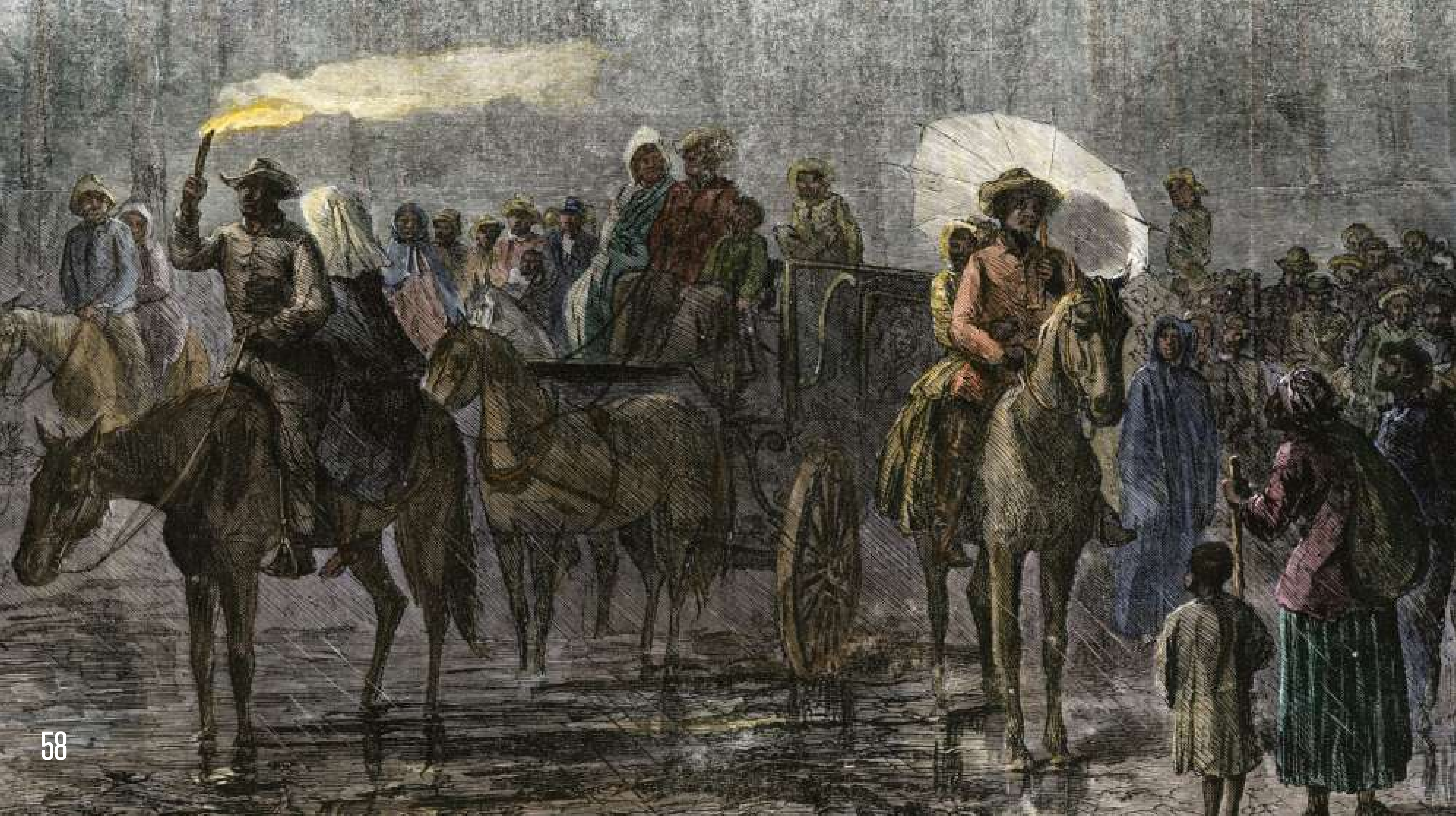
Over the course of his more than a decade with the Vigilance Committee, Still would be involved in the escape of hundreds of fugitives from slavery, but perhaps the most famous of these escapes came in 1849, early in his career on the Underground Railroad. It involved a man named Henry Brown. Brown was enslaved in Richmond, Virginia, but was married to a woman named Nancy who was enslaved to a different owner. For a time, the couple was able to live together, but before long the cruel realities of slavery tore them apart. Nancy's master sold her away to the South, along with the couple's three children.

It was at this point, having been torn from his family, that Brown decided to flee from bondage. Working with two accomplices, one white and one Black, and in cooperation with Still and the Vigilance Committee, Brown had himself sealed into a crate and mailed to Philadelphia. Improvements in transportation meant that this journey would take only about 24 hours, far less than it would have just a few years before, but these would be excruciating hours; some of those involved in planning this escape feared that Brown would not survive the journey. Nevertheless, when the crate arrived in the office of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, and the lid was pried off, Brown emerged, exhausted but alive, forever after known as Henry "Box" Brown. He recuperated for a few days, staying with the Still family for part of this time, before travelling on further north to relative safety.

Brown's escape was, in some ways, extraordinary, but in other ways it was typical of the many paths that fugitives from slavery took that brought them to Still's doorstep. Still and the Vigilance Committee built a network that drew brave and resourceful fugitives like Brown to Philadelphia, just miles from the legal boundary between the free and slave states, and at the centre of a burgeoning transportation infrastructure. They came to Still by train, by steamship, by foot, and by rowboat, and yes, some followed Henry Brown's path and came in boxes. In almost every case, though, it was not Still who initiated the flight to freedom – it was the individual him or herself who fled from slavery.

Still and the Vigilance Committee helped ensure fugitives found their way to Philadelphia, and once they arrived, they provided them with refuge – a place to stay, medical care, food, a bath and a fresh pair of clothes, and helped send them on to where they would be safer. Sometimes this meant the relative

> "In order to function, the Underground Railroad needed money, and one of William Still's responsibilities was to raise it"



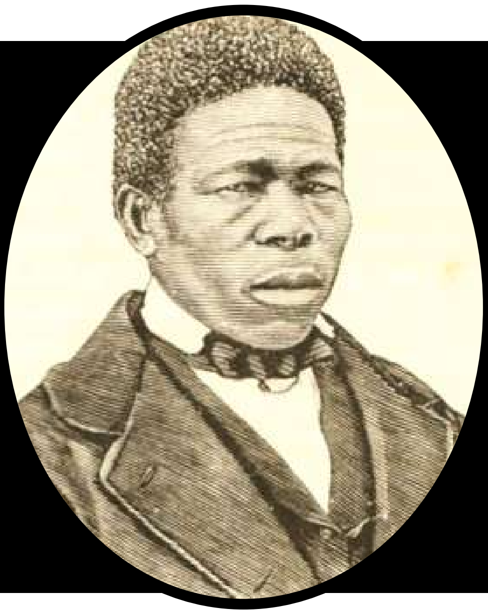
BELOW It is estimated that 25,000 to 50,000 slaves escaped via the Underground Railroad

THE STORY OF PETER STILL

Two brothers, torn apart by slavery but reunited by the Underground Railroad

Years before William Still was born, when his mother fled from slavery in Maryland for a second time, she left the two older children, boys named Levin and Peter, behind. Charity Still calculated that her second flight would be even more dangerous than the first, and the heartbreaking decision to leave behind the boys was her only chance to free herself and the two daughters she took with her. She expected never to see the boys again, but in this, she was wrong.

Peter Still's reconciliation with his family is one of the most remarkable stories of the Underground Railroad. After their mother's flight, the boys were sold South, first to Kentucky and later to Alabama. Years later, after the death of his older brother, Peter was finally able to purchase his freedom. Upon doing so, he decided to head north, looking for the family he had lost so many years before. He had little to go on – his family had even changed their last name, from Steel to Still. And so, when he arrived at the office of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society in 1850, and sat down across from William Still, hoping that this man he had never met before might help him find his long-lost family, neither Peter nor William had any idea the surprise that was in store for them both.



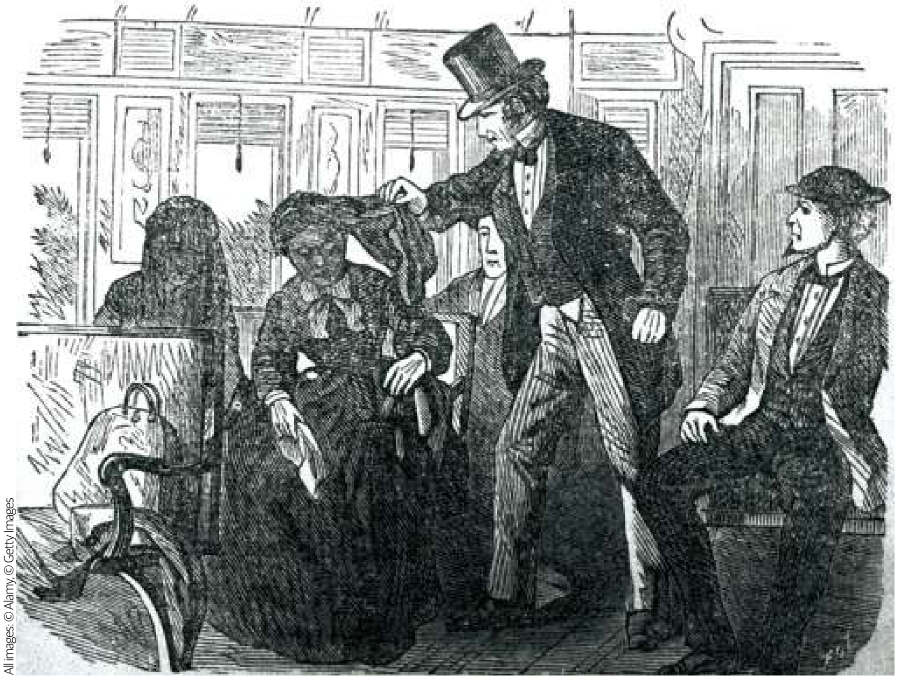
safety of New England, but ideally fugitives headed on to British Canada, where US law could not reach them.

More often than not, fugitives stayed in the Still home while they remained in Philadelphia, which they shared with the growing Still family; a daughter, Caroline, was born in 1848, followed by a son, William Wilberforce Still, in 1854. William and Letitia Still ultimately provided refuge for hundreds of men, women, and children. Many of these fugitives had left their own families behind when they ran away, and even their brief stay in the Still household was a welcome respite.

THE BUSINESS OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

In order to function, the Underground Railroad needed money, and one of William Still's responsibilities was to raise this money. Just as Still built a network to enable the flow of fugitive slaves into and out of Philadelphia, so too did he build a network of those who were willing to support the Underground Railroad financially. Some of these supporters were wealthy white Quakers, who were known for their support of the abolitionist cause. Black churches were also important supporters of the Vigilance Committee. Across the Atlantic, British abolitionists expressed their support for the Underground Railroad by sending significant contributions to Still in Philadelphia.

BELOW An engraving from William Still's *The Underground Railroad* (1872) showing a man searching a railcar for escaped slaves



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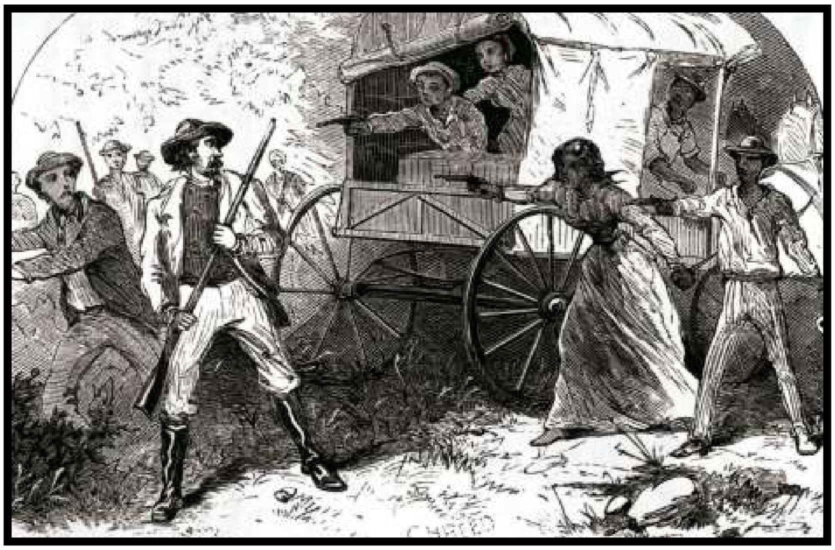
Still kept careful records of the money he raised as well as the money he spent on fugitives passing through Philadelphia. He also kept records of each individual passing through his office: where they had come from, where they were going, how they escaped, their names, and appearance. Doing so was risky, since the work of the Vigilance Committee was illegal, and in the wrong hands these records might endanger the very fugitives who Still had helped to escape. This risk was worth taking, though, because these records enabled Still to demonstrate to those who were donating to his work that these contributions were well-spent. Even more important, the records helped families and friends to find each other, sometimes years after they were separated.

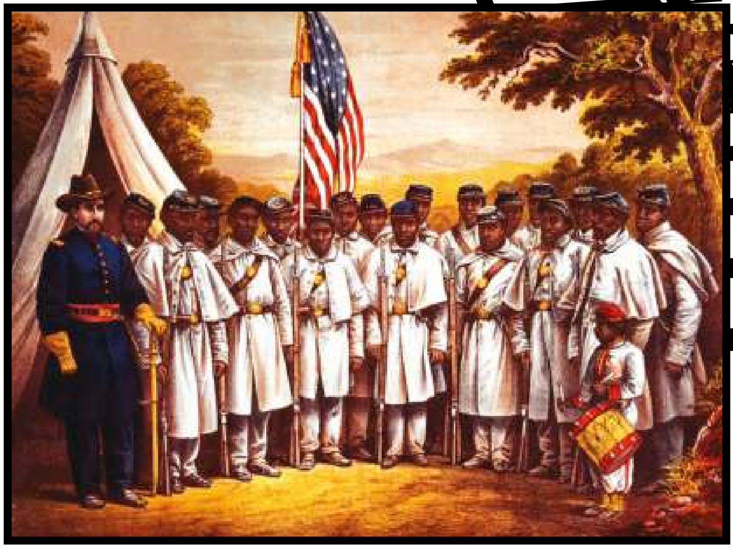
Still's Vigilance Committee also gathered information. Southern newspapers were delivered daily to Still's office, and he pored over the runaway slave advertisements in these papers, looking for fugitives who might be headed to Philadelphia. He also developed a network of informants. Some were policemen friendly to his cause. More often these informants were African Americans who were eager to pass along to Still whatever intelligence they came by that might be of use to him. Still also built a more formal network of allies along the East Coast, in towns and cities large and small, who increasingly sent information to Still via letter or by the new technology of the telegraph. Speed was crucial, since this network was competing with professional slave catchers, always trying to stay one step ahead of those who wanted to re-enslave people who had fled from bondage.

Still did most of his work from his office in Philadelphia, but he had associates who did travel into the South to more directly guide fugitive slaves to freedom. The most famous of these associates was Harriet Tubman, who had escaped from slavery in Maryland in 1849. Over the next decade, she would return again and again to her native state, guiding as many as 70 enslaved people out of bondage – most she sent to Still in Philadelphia.

CIVIL WAR

Still's Vigilance Committee work had played a role in the escalating sectional tensions of the 1850s, but as the North and South lunged toward open war, he left his position at the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. In part this was necessitated by his desire to devote more time to his coal business, a business that would make him quite wealthy over the next decade. William Still, however, was not about to turn his back on the struggle to which he had dedicated more than a decade of his life. The war years saw Still shift his attention, though, to efforts to aid refugees, raising money for freed men and women in the South, and finding jobs for former slaves who sought refuge in Philadelphia. He supported the enlistment of Black regiments to ▶





"When he died in 1902, newspapers labelled Still the father of the Underground Railroad"

support the war effort, and he served as a sutler for Camp William Penn, where many of these soldiers trained.

Still also focused on the struggle for Black civil and political rights, a struggle that had always been a part of the fight against slavery. With the onset of the Civil War, fugitive slaves were no longer in danger of being re-enslaved, but the city discriminated against its Black citizens in any number of ways. Black men and women, for example, were denied equal access to the streetcars that were increasingly important means of travel around the growing city of Philadelphia. Still spearheaded the effort that eventually outlawed such segregation.

He also turned his newfound wealth to philanthropy. Still became a patron of Black artists and writers, hoping that displays of Black excellence might serve as a demonstration of the respectability and capability of African Americans. He also supported charities that provided for the most impoverished Black Philadelphians, especially orphans or the elderly, making sure that his personal prosperity benefited the Black community in which he lived.

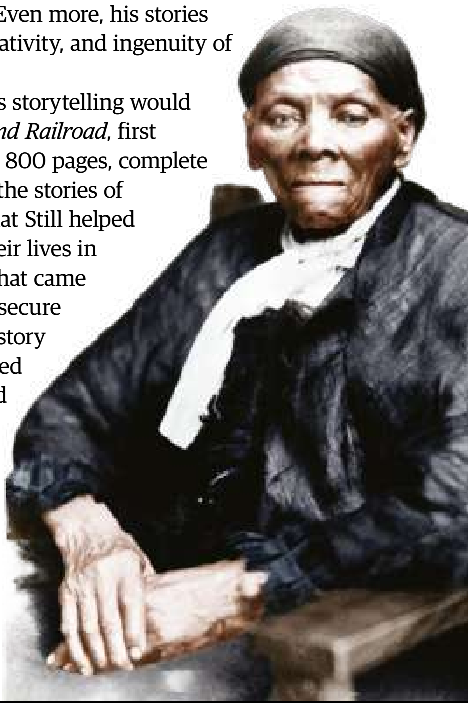
TELLING HIS STORY

In time, Still became a sort of unofficial historian of the Underground Railroad. He had long used selective details of the Underground Railroad, published in abolitionist newspapers, as a means of raising money and support for his work. After the Civil War, Still's stories of fugitives from slavery and those who helped them on their way took on an additional resonance. Already, the Underground Railroad had assumed a legendary character, and many of the stories that were being told about it emphasised its white participants. Such accounts reduced fugitive slaves to the role of helpless beneficiaries of white benevolence. For Still, who never denied the importance of his white allies, it was important to be clear about the centrality of free Black contributions to the Underground Railroad. Even more, his stories emphasised the bravery, creativity, and ingenuity of fugitive slaves themselves.

The ultimate fruit of Still's storytelling would be his book, *The Underground Railroad*, first published in 1872. Its nearly 800 pages, complete with vivid illustrations, tell the stories of the hundreds of fugitives that Still helped on their way to freedom: their lives in bondage, their flight, and what came after. The book also helped secure Still's central place in the history of this struggle. When he died in 1902, newspapers labelled Still the "father of the Underground Railroad." This was a title that he never claimed while he was alive, but it was a fitting honour for a man who had helped so many fugitive slaves on their roads to freedom. ○

ABOVE-LEFT This illustration from Still's *The Underground Railroad* shows armed slaves defending themselves against slave catchers

ABOVE-RIGHT An illustration of Black soldiers at Camp William Penn, where William Still worked as sutler



RIGHT Harriet Tubman, herself an escaped slave, who frequently returned to Maryland to help free others

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PHILADELPHIA: CITY OF FREE SLAVES

While the road to slavery's abolishment was rocky, the city quickly became a destination for escaping slaves

In 1780, Pennsylvania made history as the first state to pass an act for the abolition of slavery. Unfortunately, the initial impact of the act was limited as only the children born of slaves following its enactment would be free. Even after this, slaves could still be kept due to 'sojourner' laws that required them to be moved out of state every six months, according to The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia.

By the dawn of the 19th century however, the numbers of slaves in the state had declined significantly and when Pennsylvania abolished slavery in 1847, it all but vanished. The city of Philadelphia became a hive for abolitionists and a place from which escaped slaves could flee too. However, there were still dangers on the streets of Philly, as kidnappers sought to capture Free Blacks and sell them back into slavery.

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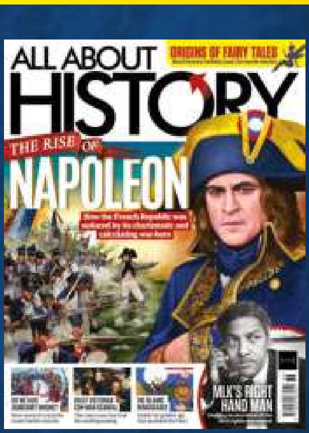
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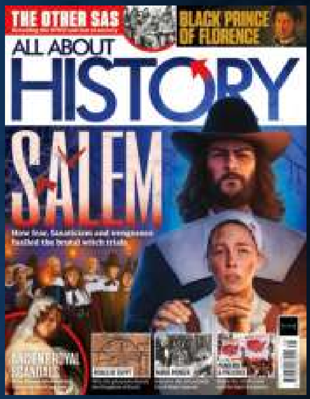
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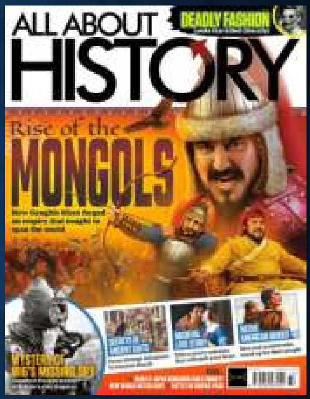
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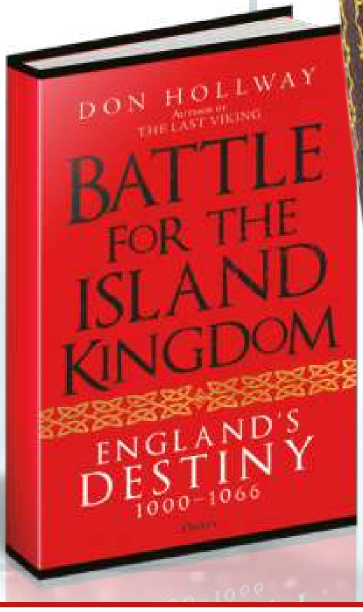
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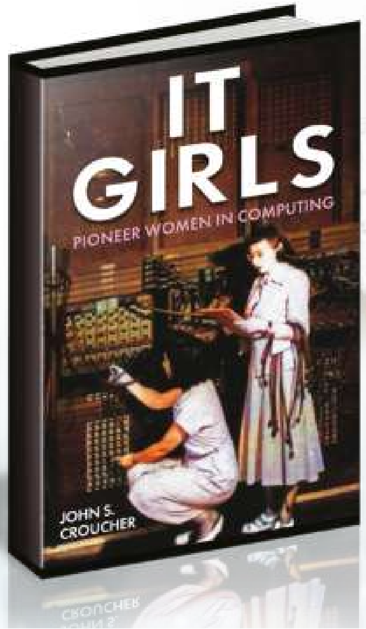
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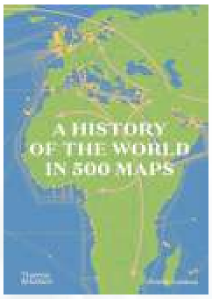
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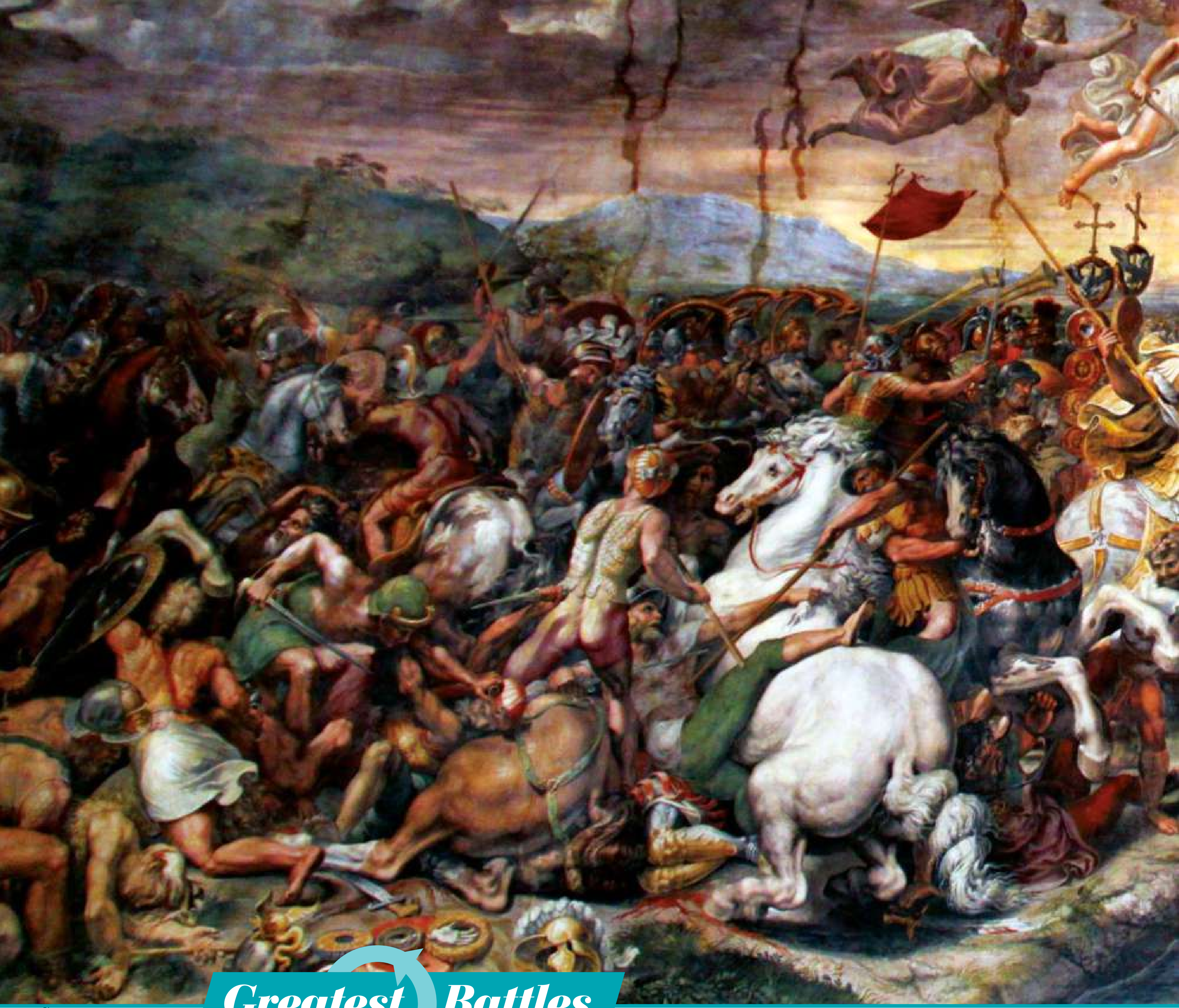


Greatest Battles

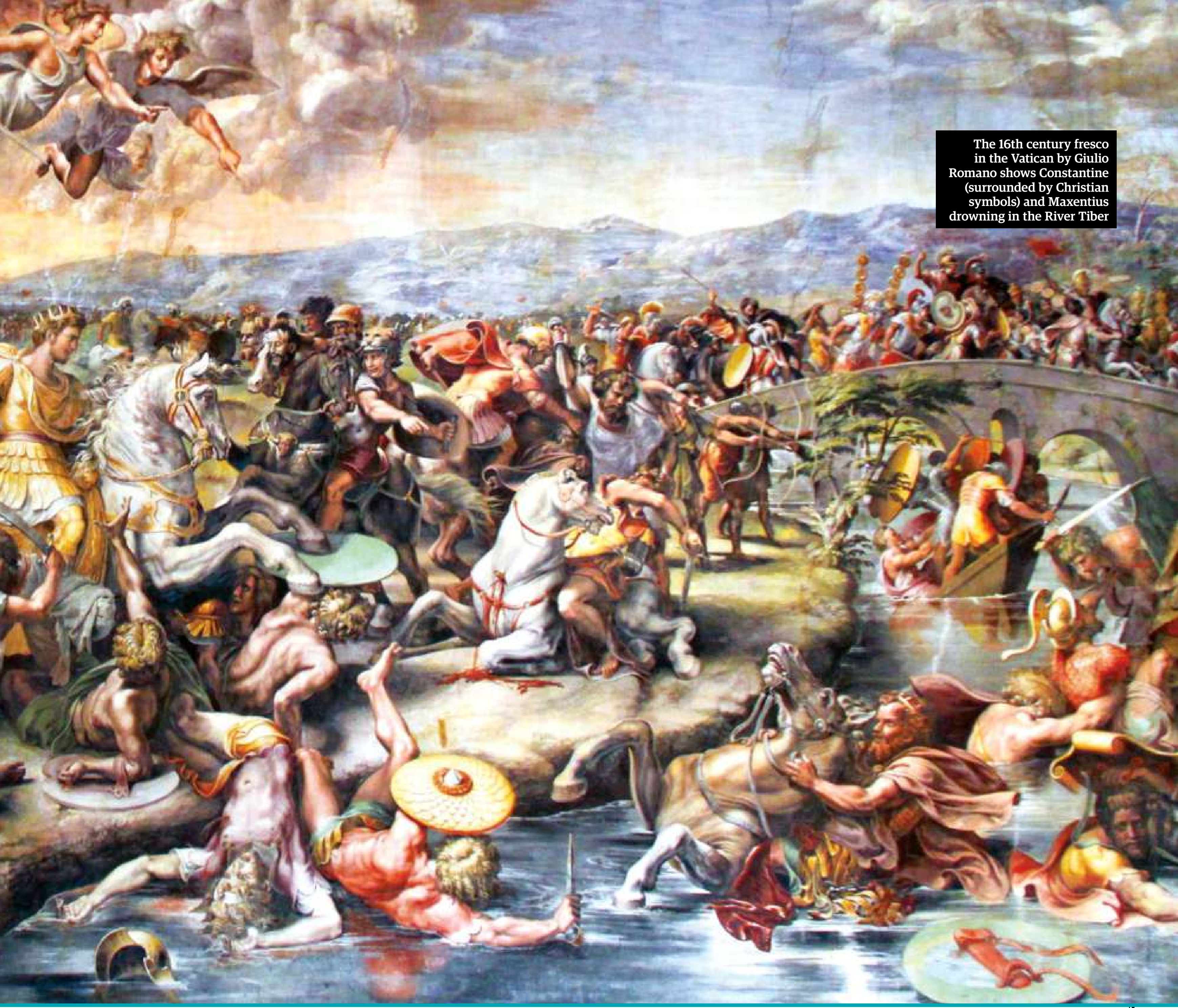
BATTLE OF MILVIAN BRIDGE

PONTE MILVIO, ITALY, 28 OCTOBER 312 CE

Written by Murray Dahm

In late October 312 CE, the fate of the future of the Roman world was decided near the Pons Milvius, the Milvian Bridge (the modern-day Ponte Milvio, Italy), crossing the River Tiber some five kilometres (three miles) north of Rome on the Via Flaminia. The battle was the culmination of the war between rival Roman emperors, Maxentius and Constantine, to see who would dominate the western Roman Empire.

In 293 CE, Emperor Diocletian had introduced a system of two emperors (augusti; singular: augustus) and two junior-emperors (caesares; singular: caesar), to govern what had become an unstable system of one emperor ruling over the entire empire. The previous century had seen a great deal of instability and more than 50 emperors and usurpers. This new system was known as the Tetrarchy and saw



The 16th century fresco in the Vatican by Giulio Romano shows Constantine (surrounded by Christian symbols) and Maxentius drowning in the River Tiber

the empire split between east and west. The west was governed from Mediolanum (modern-day Milan) and Augusta Treverorum (modern-day Trier, Germany); the east from Nicomedia (modern-day Izmit, Turkey) and Sirmium (modern-day Sremska Mitrovica, near Belgrade, Serbia). The system worked well until 305 CE when Diocletian and his co-emperor, Maximian, retired and the caesares, Galerius and Constantius, were raised to augusti and new caesares were appointed: Maximinus Daza to Galerius and Valerius Severus to Constantius.

Constantius died in York in July 306 CE, and his son, Flavius Valerius Constantinus (known as Constantine), was acclaimed augustus by his father's army. Constantius' co-emperor Galerius promoted Severus to augustus as the system dictated. In October that year, the retired emperor Maximian's son, Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maxentius, declared himself augustus (in opposition to Severus). Rivalry and ambition were already putting the Tetrarchy system at risk.

Maxentius had probably expected to succeed his father, but in this he was disappointed – he would, however, prove to be popular with the troops. Severus, sent to defeat Maxentius by Galerius, suffered the ignominy of his army deserting to his enemy and he surrendered to Maxentius in 307 CE. Galerius marched on Rome himself but he, too, was unsuccessful. Both Maxentius and Constantine were therefore recognised as augusti. Both men had had military careers that would prove immensely useful to their claims.

A crisis meeting to avoid further civil war held in Carnuntum in 308 CE declared that Licinius would be augustus of the west with Constantine as his caesar, Galerius would be augustus of the east with Maximinus continuing as his caesar. Maxentius was declared a usurper. This arrangement lasted no longer than the meeting. Maxentius had seized control of Italy and Africa, and neither Constantine or Maximinus were willing to tolerate (the less-experienced) Licinius being promoted to augustus over them.

Civil war blossomed. By 309 CE, all four candidates were declared augusti – the retired emperor Maximian was forced to kill himself in 310 CE. In April 311 CE, Galerius died (of natural causes) and his death saw a race to secure his power base. While Licinius and Maximinus competed in the east, in the west, Constantine was free to march on Italy, Maxentius' stronghold.

Main image: wiki/Vatican City, Apostolic Palace

According to the historian Eutropius, Constantine's reasons for invading were because he sought to re-unite the empire under his sole rule. The territory controlled by Constantine included Britain, Spain, Gaul and Germany; Maxentius controlled Italy and Africa and several of the islands of the western Mediterranean (he had control of the fleets at Misenum and Ravenna).

In late 311 CE and early 312 CE, Constantine was on the Rhine frontier. There, he raised an army of 40,000 men according to a contemporary anonymous panegyric written in 313 CE. Other historians (like Zosimus) make his force much larger, at 98,000 men. Maxentius did not take the war to Constantine but awaited his coming, possibly because he also feared attack by Licinius if he moved north.

In spring 312 CE, Constantine marched his forces south and invaded northern Italy. Awaiting him, Maxentius had raised 100,000 men according to the panegyric. Again, Zosimus makes this figure much larger: 188,000 men. Crossing the Cottian Alps, Constantine took Segusio (modern-day Susa, Italy). Constantine marched on Augusta Taurinorum (modern-day Turin) and then Verona, and defeated two armies commanded by Maxentius' subordinates. Constantine showed himself a brilliant strategist and he inspired his men leading from the front. At Turin, he completely destroyed Maxentius' heaviest cavalry.

There were other Maxentian strongholds in the north (such as Aquileia) but Constantine quickly organised his troops to march on his ultimate destination, Rome. Constantine marched from Venetia down towards Rome, crossing the Apennines. Towns needed to be taken on the route, and there is evidence of some resistance, although it was, seemingly, insubstantial. Constantine reached the area of the Milvian Bridge, only five kilometres (three miles) from Rome, on 27 October.

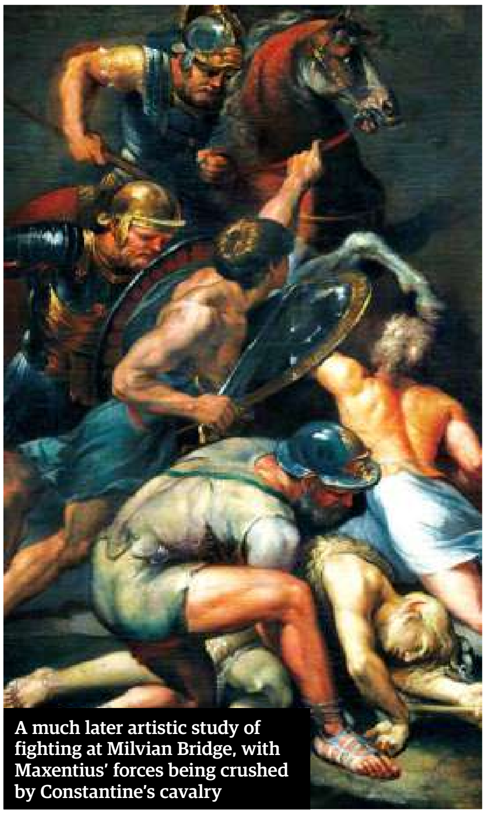

A much later artistic study of fighting at Milvian Bridge, with Maxentius' forces being crushed by Constantine's cavalry

Image source: wiki/spenceralley.blogspot.com

The modern-day Milvian Bridge, a scene of fighting in many subsequent wars near Rome, including the wars for Italian independence in the 19th century

© Getty Images

The Arch of Constantine in the Roman Forum was erected in 315 CE and depicts Constantine's victories, including Verona and the Milvian Bridge

Image source: wiki/500px/Catalin Manolescu

Having awaited Constantine's march until October, Maxentius chose this late moment to leave Rome and face Constantine in open battle. Rome had withstood Galerius' attempts to take it by siege so Maxentius should have been safe to stay there and see out Constantine's siege. According to the anonymous panegyricist, Maxentius selected the battlefield near the Milvian Bridge. It had several disadvantages. His men would fight with the river at their backs, so repositioning and retreat were nigh on impossible.

The choice of the battlefield close to the Milvian Bridge has perplexed historians – at first glance it would seem to be a noose around Maxentius' neck. One ancient source, Aurelius Victor, does not even mention it – he claims the battle was fought at Saxa Rubra (meaning 'red rocks', modern Prima Porta), 14.5km (nine miles) from Rome (beyond the bridge on the Via Flaminia). He is the only source to mention this as the battle site. All the others name the Milvian Bridge as integral to the battle and we should trust them.

The bridge itself seems to have been a central part of Maxentius' battle plan, although this is a factor missing in several ancient accounts. If Maxentius had made it back to Rome he could have withstood a siege there (Constantine had been unable to take Verona by siege).

Lactantius tells us that after Maxentius had crossed the bridge, it was cut down behind him. Stranding himself on the northern bank of the Tiber might seem senseless – his own return was blocked – but if he was defeated, Constantine too could not continue his advance (and Maxentius could escape to withstand a siege). However, Lactantius also states that the bridge was taken down within sight of the army so that they would know they had to fight.

The bishop of Caesarea, Eusebius, talks not of the bridge itself but of a bridge of boats, even claiming Constantine told him this detail himself (which battle he was talking of is not altogether clear, however). Eusebius wrote two accounts of the battle. The first, probably written in 315 CE in his *Ecclesiastical History* was also the basis of a much later version in his *Life Of Constantine*. He tells us that Constantine was aided by God and won three victories before advancing to the Milvian Bridge. His account does give us useful detail. He tells us that Maxentius had (Praetorian) guardsmen and regular soldiers and used a bridge of boats to cross the river (perhaps suggesting the Milvian Bridge itself was already demolished). He tells us that Maxentius retreated, turning his back on the "God-sent power that was with Constantine", and headed back to the bridge of boats surrounded by his bodyguards. The bridge of boats over the river subsequently collapsed and the men drowned, including Maxentius.

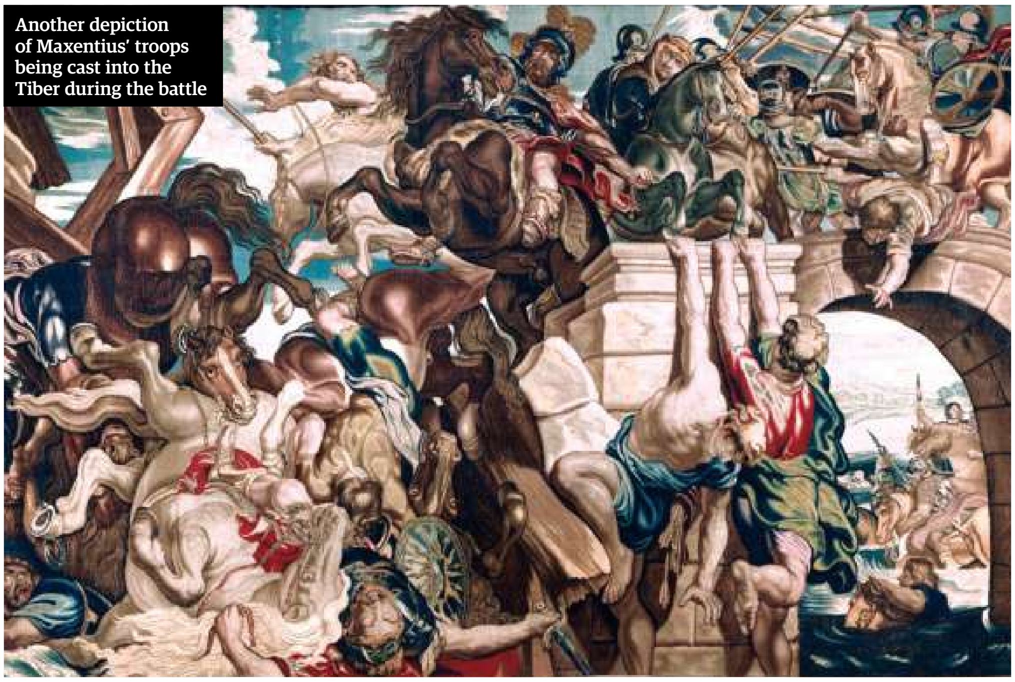
Other accounts, however, complicate this use of the bridge and make it part of a cunning ruse on the part of Maxentius to try to trap and destroy Constantine. The bridge of boats is also mentioned in Eusebius' *Life Of Constantine* implying it was part of a stratagem to trap Constantine while he was pursuing an apparently fleeing Maxentius. This implies that Maxentius always intended to retreat from the battlefield in apparent flight - a factor few have considered in reconstructing the battle. Aurelius Victor has Maxentius defeated at Saxa Rubra and retreating to the Milvian Bridge. There, he was caught in his own ambush, a manoeuvre he had prepared for Constantine (this might tie with the bridge of boats collapsing in Eusebius). The anonymous *Epitome De Caesaribus* tells us Maxentius drowned from his collapsing bridge en route to face Constantine, not fleeing from battle with him. Zosimus too talks of a bridge built across the Tiber as a trap to catch a pursuing Constantine, and goes into some detail on how the trap would be sprung.

Maxentius' army was therefore deployed to face Constantine's on the northern bank of the Tiber across the Milvian Bridge. Zosimus tells us that the battlefield was a broad plain suitable for cavalry. Historian Ross Cowan has identified the field as the plain beyond the Tor di Quinto. Maxentius had almost twice as many cavalry as Constantine and almost three times as many infantry. Constantine's advantage was that his army had marched from victory to victory and were confident in their own fortune and in their commander, who once again took up position in the front ranks where danger would be closest.

Nazarinus tells us Constantine was the first to fall on the enemy line, implying a cavalry charge, and he alone broke into the enemy ranks (perhaps an exaggeration). The infantry were then given the signal and they too attacked. According to Zosimus, a fierce battle ensued. Lactantius claims that both sides formed their battle lines and fought to a standstill, neither side giving ground. Many were killed but Maxentius' (guard) cavalry stood firm; when they fled, however, the army gave way, Maxentius at their head. The anonymous panegyricist also records that (only) one unit of Maxentius' soldiers stood their ground. This was no doubt part of the plan - Constantine was meant to pursue and be destroyed by doing so. Maxentius no doubt knew that Constantine would lead the way in pursuit, and this made him vulnerable.

Unfortunately, Maxentius' plan came completely unstuck. Zosimus tells that the timbers of the (modified) bridge could not hold the weight of the retreating cavalry and gave way, drowning Maxentius and his bodyguard. We have chosen to interpret that Maxentius modified the Milvian Bridge itself rather than that he constructed a second bridge of boats; this modification of the existing bridge can explain all the aspects of the battle where the bridge is concerned.

According to the anonymous panegyricist, Maxentius' army fled at the first charge of Constantine's army. The retreat across a single narrow bridge meant the Maxentian forces could be cut down on the northern bank of the river as they crowded the bridge trying to cross. Several jumped into the river and attempted to swim across. Several accounts talk of the defeated, retreating Maxentians being trapped crowding about the bridge. If they had seen it being demolished they would surely not have headed back towards it. If, however, it was meant to be brought down at the time of


Another depiction of Maxentius' troops being cast into the Tiber during the battle

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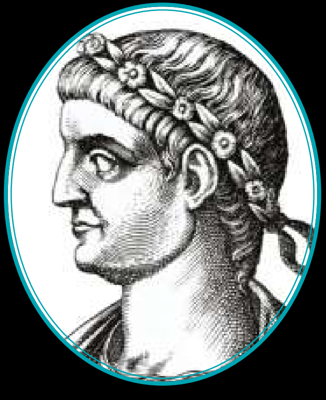
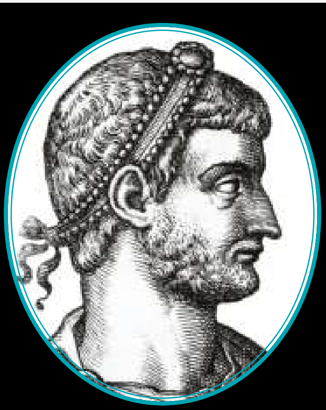


FLAVIUS VALERIUS CONSTANTINUS (CONSTANTINE)

Son of Constantius Chlorus, one of the original Tetrarchy, and Flavia Julia Helena, born in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), Constantine was the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity and was pivotal in the religion's spread through the empire. He also relocated the seat of the empire in the east to Byzantium, later Constantinople.

ARMY: **40,000** (ANONYMOUS PANEGYRIC)
INFANTRY: **35,100** (PANEGYRIC), **90,000** (ZOSIMUS) LEGIONARY DETACHMENTS AND AUXILIA
CAVALRY: **8,000** (ZOSIMUS) (PROPORTIONATELY 4,900 OF THE PANEGYRIC'S TOTAL FIGURE), VEXILLATIONES AND NUMERI



MARCUS AURELIUS VALERIUS MAXENTIUS

Son of another of the Tetrarchy, Maximian, and Eutropia, of Syrian Greek heritage, Maxentius had the backing of the Senate, but not his fellow rulers when he was nominated to rule. The civil conflict that followed divided the Tetrarchy and having been defeated, made Maxentius the last Roman emperor to have his residence in Rome.

ARMY: **100,000** (ANONYMOUS PANEGYRIC)
INFANTRY: **90,500** (PANEGYRIC), **170,000** (ZOSIMUS) PRAETORIANS, LEGIONARIES, AUXILIARIES, **80,000** LEVIES FROM ITALY AND SICILY AND **40,000** FROM NORTH AFRICA
CAVALRY: **18,000** (ZOSIMUS) (PROPORTIONATELY 9,500 OF THE PANEGYRIC'S TOTAL FIGURE) VEXILLATIONES, NUMERI AND GUARD CAVALRY

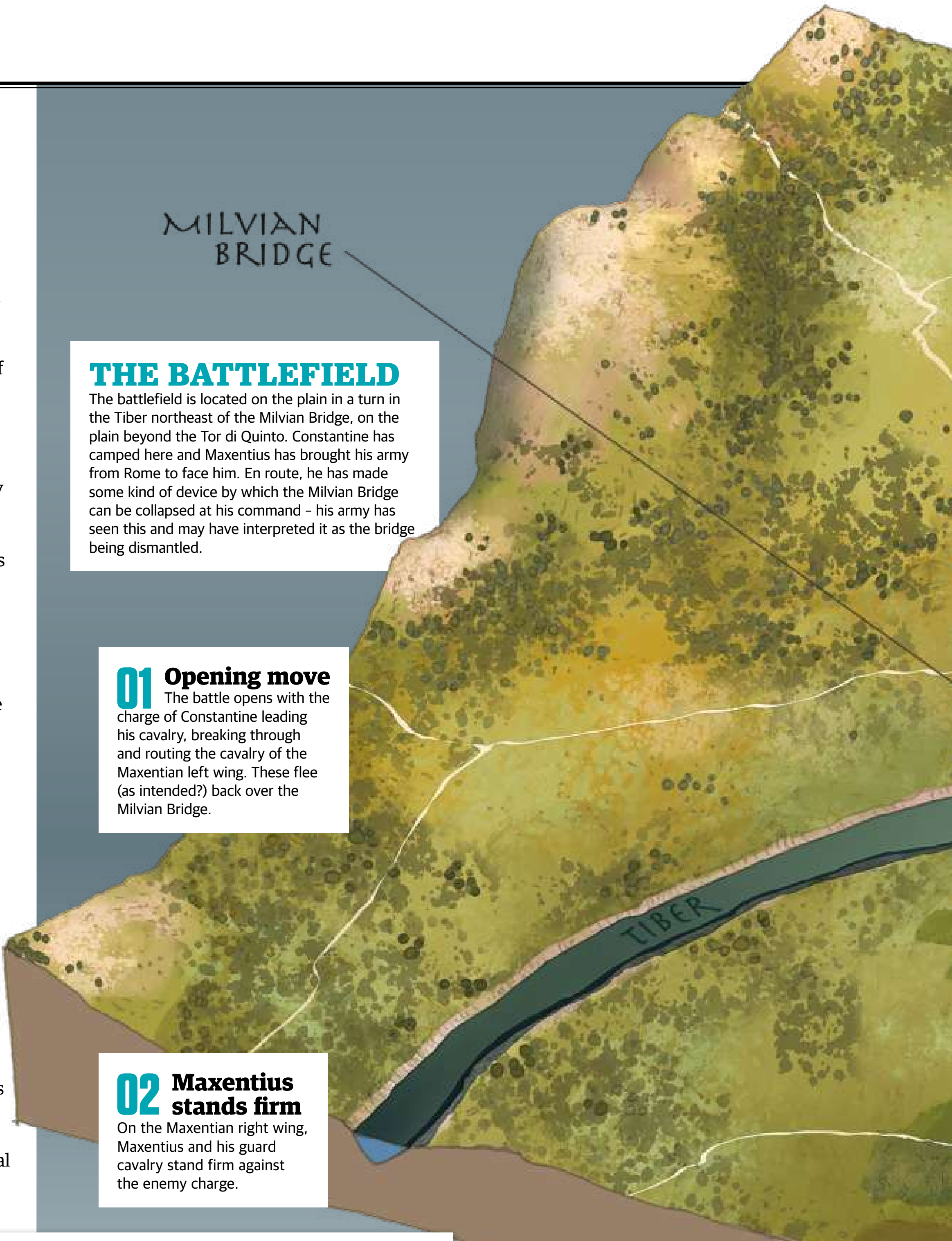
2x © Getty Images

Maxentius' choosing and the retreating men were all intended to lure Constantine on to the bridge, their heading towards it makes sense. So too does the fact that they were trapped when it collapsed early and stranded them on the wrong side of the river. This would explain the milling crowds of the retreat (they might not have known the bridge had collapsed early) and also why men swam to cross the river.

In the anonymous panegyric, Maxentius himself attempted to ford the river on his horse, but he drowned in the attempt. Nazarinus' description is the most evocative. He calls the banks of the Tiber river as an "unbroken line of slaughter" and describes the Tiber filled with bodies as the enemy Maxentius shamefully fled and was drowned. Nazarinus, too, however, seems not to have recognised Maxentius' apparent flight as part of his ill-fated battle plan.

In Lactantius, Maxentius joined the battle after the fighting had already started and it was the hand of God on the battle line which caused the Maxentians to flee (but still towards the bridge). Maxentius fled, too, and was drowned crossing the river. A decisive charge at some point in the battle, rather than the initial charge in the panegyric, is much more likely.

Constantine's immediate reward for victory at the Milvian Bridge was Rome itself. Possessing it (and the death of Maxentius) made Constantine the undisputed emperor of the western Roman Empire. In the east, however, Licinius was still augustus and Constantine faced further civil war to re-unite the empire under his singular rule. At the same time as the battle of the Milvian Bridge, Licinius was warring with Maximinus in the east. The latter was defeated in battle in 313 CE and committed suicide. This left only Licinius and Constantine, who continued to fight. Constantine would win final victory at the Battle of Chrysopolis in 324 CE (fought on the outskirts of Byzantium, now a suburb of Istanbul), defeating Licinius and becoming sole emperor, establishing a new imperial dynasty and earning the epithet 'the Great' – the only Roman emperor to do so.



THE BATTLEFIELD

The battlefield is located on the plain in a turn in the Tiber northeast of the Milvian Bridge, on the plain beyond the Tor di Quinto. Constantine has camped here and Maxentius has brought his army from Rome to face him. En route, he has made some kind of device by which the Milvian Bridge can be collapsed at his command – his army has seen this and may have interpreted it as the bridge being dismantled.

01 Opening move

The battle opens with the charge of Constantine leading his cavalry, breaking through and routing the cavalry of the Maxentian left wing. These flee (as intended?) back over the Milvian Bridge.

02 Maxentius stands firm

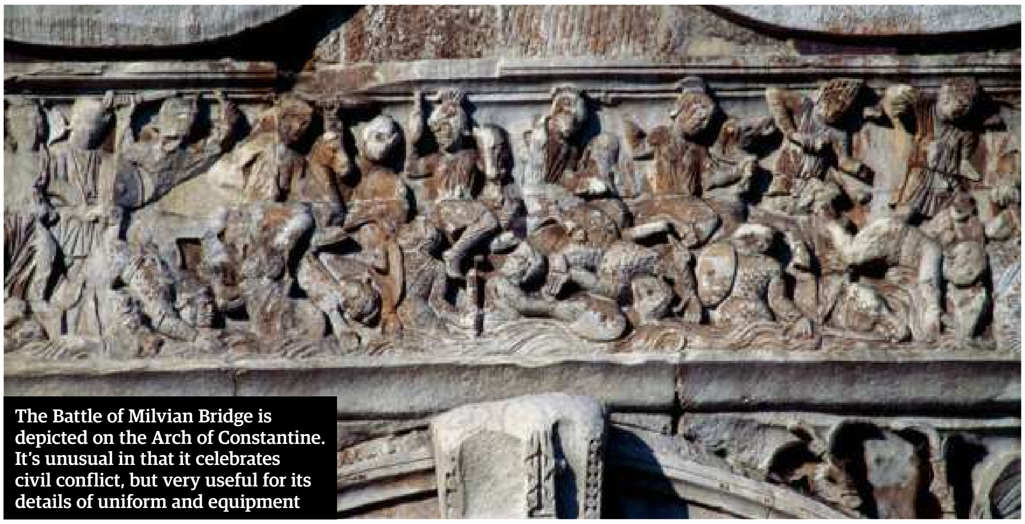
On the Maxentian right wing, Maxentius and his guard cavalry stand firm against the enemy charge.

03 The infantry engage

At the signal, the infantry of Constantine advance and fight – outnumbered almost three-to-one in the centre. A fierce engagement ensues.

04 Rout or ruse

The bodyguard cavalry of Maxentius give way (as intended?) and make for the bridge. This 'rout' is followed by the Maxentian infantry also retreating towards the bridge. Constantine's forces pursue.

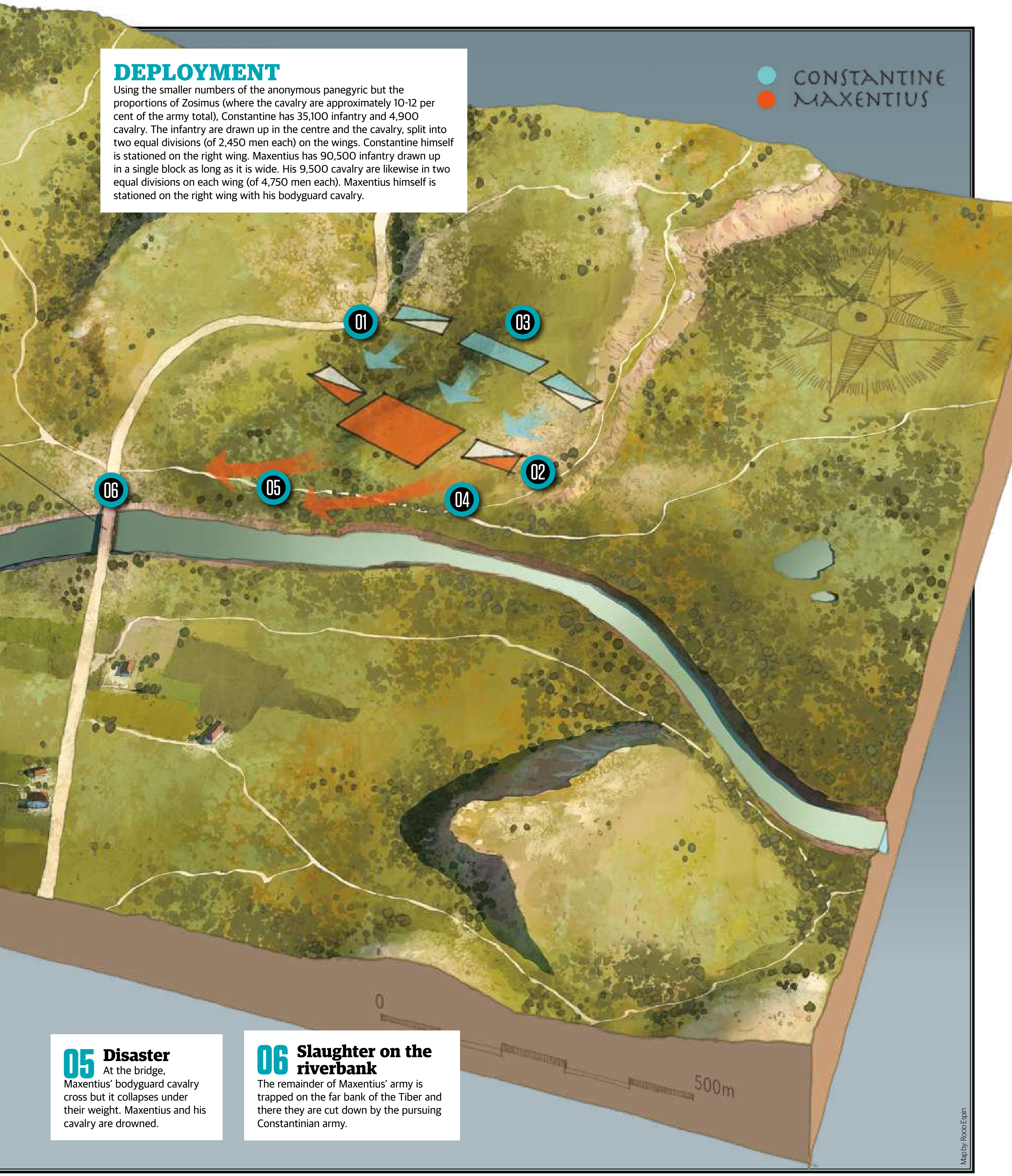


The Battle of Milvian Bridge is depicted on the Arch of Constantine. It's unusual in that it celebrates civil conflict, but very useful for its details of uniform and equipment

© Getty Images

DEPLOYMENT

Using the smaller numbers of the anonymous panegyric but the proportions of Zosimus (where the cavalry are approximately 10-12 per cent of the army total), Constantine has 35,100 infantry and 4,900 cavalry. The infantry are drawn up in the centre and the cavalry, split into two equal divisions (of 2,450 men each) on the wings. Constantine himself is stationed on the right wing. Maxentius has 90,500 infantry drawn up in a single block as long as it is wide. His 9,500 cavalry are likewise in two equal divisions on each wing (of 4,750 men each). Maxentius himself is stationed on the right wing with his bodyguard cavalry.



05 Disaster

At the bridge, Maxentius' bodyguard cavalry cross but it collapses under their weight. Maxentius and his cavalry are drowned.

06 Slaughter on the riverbank

The remainder of Maxentius' army is trapped on the far bank of the Tiber and there they are cut down by the pursuing Constantinian army.

Map by: Rocio Espin

THE FRANKS HAD LOST THE BATTLE OF TOURS

With a Muslim success at Tours, the culture, religion and power of the Arab world could reach deeper into Europe than ever before

Interview by David J. Williamson

INTERVIEW WITH

© J Palmer

PROFESSOR JAMES T PALMER

Professor James T Palmer is an early medieval historian at the University of St Andrews. His new book, *Merovingians Worlds*, will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2024.

Having established a strong Islamic foothold in the Iberian Peninsula, aspirations of territory and power north of the Pyrenees was perhaps a logical step to take. But the region between Poitiers and Tours was not just a step, it was a giant leap, and a huge gamble. Standing in the way of the Muslim forces, Charles Martel has historically been depicted as the embodiment of staunch Christian fortitude, faith, and resilience to repel the invader and destroy his ambitions. Victory would preserve both his religion and his people. Failure would unlock the gates of France to dominance by the Arab world and change the face of Europe forever.

What next steps would the Umayyad Caliphate need to take to consolidate a victory at Tours?

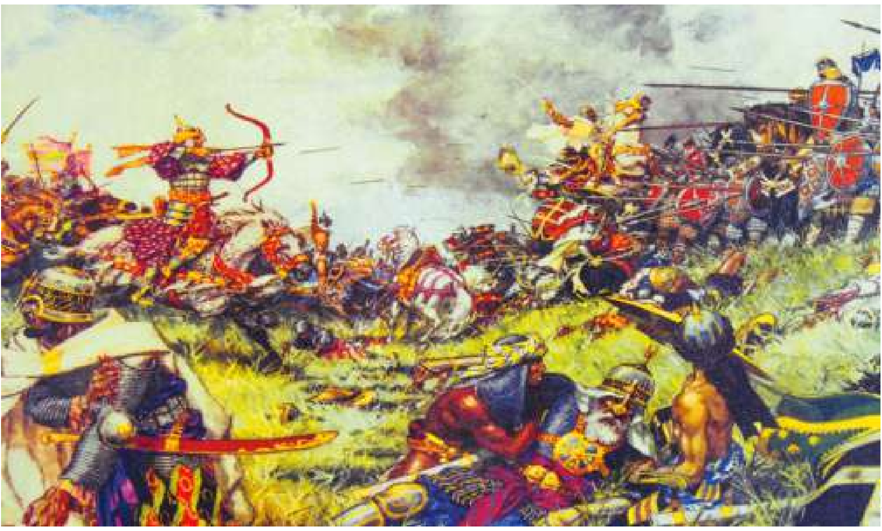
Marching an army as far north from Arab-controlled Spain as Tours was a bit of a wild move. The Arab governor, ‘Abd al-Rahman, was trying to take advantage of conflict between Charles Martel and the Duke of Aquitaine at a time when the King of the Franks in Paris had little authority. Bold moves had worked before in the Arab conquests of the Levant and North Africa. Consolidation there always involved targeting administrative centres and working with local populations to keep administration functioning. In the Frankish Kingdom, that would have meant targeting Paris next and hoping that alliances could be forged quickly with nobles who were feeling mercenary or who were tired of the weaknesses of the Merovingian Frankish kings – a dynasty that hadn't produced a dynamic figurehead in decades. The Arabs had presented themselves as a positive change to nobles in Visigothic Spain when they conquered the region in 711 and that had made for a relatively bloodless process.

The safer alternative for ‘Abd al-Rahman would have been to focus on commanding the southern cities of Toulouse and Narbonne. These had once formed the core of the Visigothic Kingdom of Aquitaine, crushed by the Franks in 507. Even 200 years later, people in Narbonne still resisted rule by northerners like Charles Martel. Indeed, after the Battle of Tours, Charles had to fight a major campaign in 737 because people in Provence allied with more Arabs against him. If ‘Abd al-Rahman had tried a more patient approach, he could have found people in the south willing to support him against perceived northern oppression.

What would be the potential social and cultural impacts for the region following a Muslim victory?

Culturally, one of the biggest changes would be that the Latin West connected to more advanced philosophy and science earlier. Arab intellectuals embraced and developed complex Greek thought long lost to the Latins. With the adoption of Arabic as an extra learned language, the Franks could have been part of that.

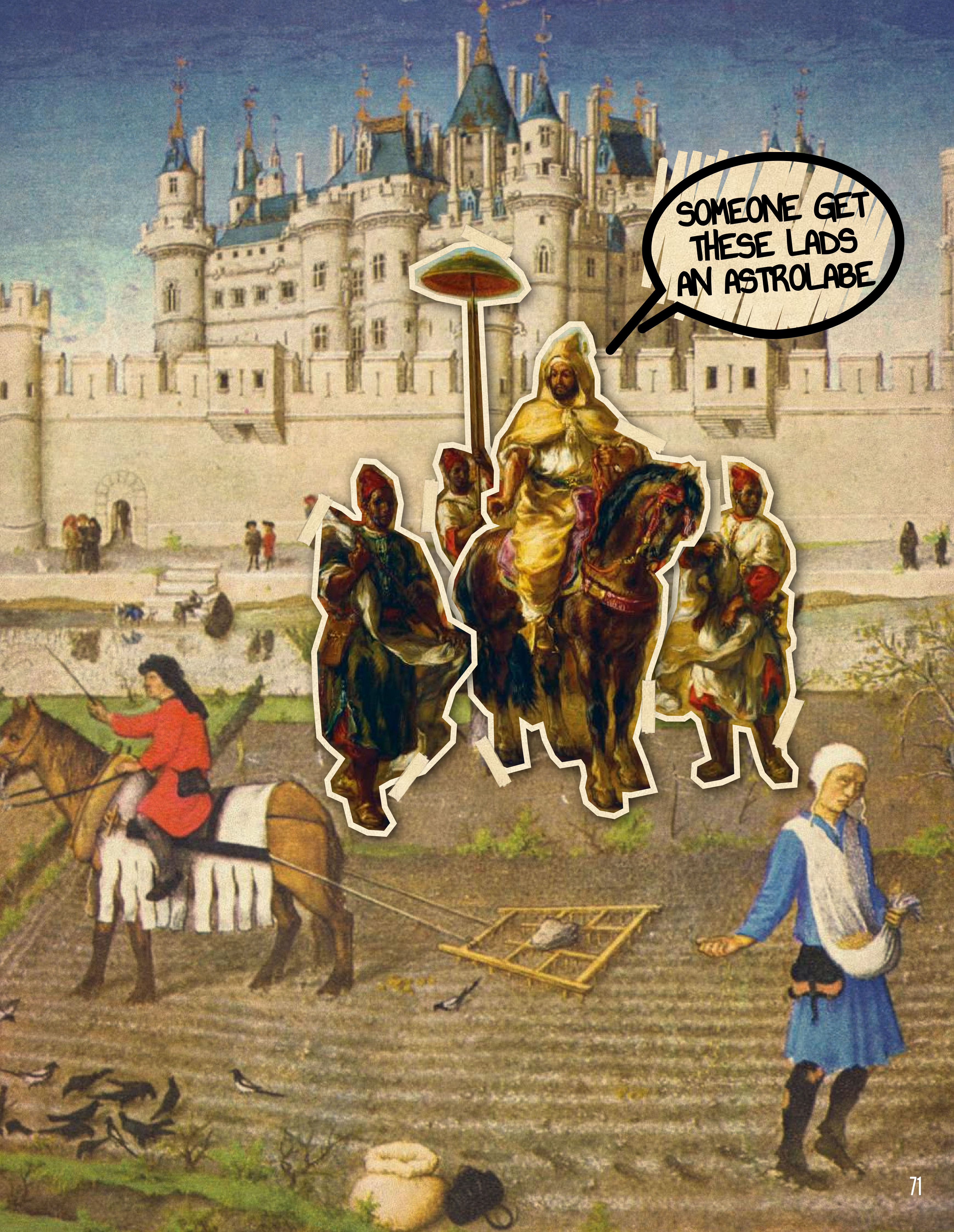
Many Franks would have remained Christian. In Spain and elsewhere,



© Alamy

RIGHT
The Battle of Tours would prove decisive for the Frankish Kingdom, and Europe

Main image source: © Getty Images


SOMEONE GET THESE LADS AN ASTROLABE

THE PAST

711

ISLAM COMES TO IBERIA

The trigger for Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula was either an appeal for help by the Christian Chief, Julian, to fight the tyrannical Visigoth King Roderick, or the invasion was simply driven by the desire to expand Islamic territory and influence. Either way, the Muslim governor of North Africa, Musa ibn Nusayr, sent troops and swiftly overcame and defeated the Visigoth army, killing King Roderick. The Visigoth rulers had been deeply unpopular, and by offering generous surrender terms, the Muslim (or Moorish) armies were soon in control of most of Spain and Portugal.

481 – 731 CE

INFIGHTING AND DIVISION

From the aftermath of the Roman Empire, the Germanic tribes merged into a single Frankish empire under Clovis, and the Merovingian Dynasty was born. The Merovingian court was violent and unstable. From the uncertainty a new title of authority emerged – Mayor of the Palace. Upon the death of one of these mayors, Pippin II, his illegitimate son Charles (Martel) emerged as a major contender. But he had to fight, and fight hard, overcoming several rebellions through numerous military campaigns across the Frankish regions – providing invaluable experience and skill in battle and diplomacy.

732

MAKE OR BREAK FOR MARTEL

Muslim leader 'Abd al-Rahman had crossed the Pyrenees and defeated the forces of Eudes of Aquitaine at Bayonne and Bordeaux. Eudes was no friend of Charles Martel, but in his desperation, he asked for help against the Islamic forces. While the forces sacked Bordeaux, the Franks assembled an army. Meeting somewhere between Poitiers and Tours, it is believed the Frankish infantry held strong against the Muslim cavalry, turning the tide of battle in their favour. A raid by the Franks on 'Abd al Rahman's supply camp dispersed and fractured the Islamic army and they retreated. 'Abd al-Rahman was killed in the battle.

ABOVE-LEFT Moorish architecture could have been widespread throughout Europe

ABOVE-RIGHT The Pyrenees were no barrier to the invading armies of Islam

Christians and Jews paid the *jizya* tax to be allowed to keep their observances. The downside was that they then had reduced rights, fewer opportunities for advancement, and paid more tax.

Matters might have been more contentious in the parts of the Frankish Kingdom that are in what is now Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. The Franks there had long felt themselves to be politically and culturally distinct from the royal heartlands around Paris. A new Arab regime in Paris may have strengthened that sense of difference and encouraged the formation of a German kingdom a century earlier than actually happened. Moreover, in the furthest northern and eastern parts, there were frontiers with pagan peoples who could not pay the *jizya* as they were not peoples of the Book. Pagan religions in these parts may have seen a resurgence in the face of a weak Christian leadership and the threat of Muslim conquest – and with that, more war would have followed.

What consequences would a defeat have for Charles Martel himself?

If Charles had survived, he would have retreated to the Rhineland to regroup. He had faced military setbacks before and hadn't come to dominate the Frankish Kingdom by giving up. From Cologne, Charles could have led a fresh alliance of Germanic-speaking regions against the Arabs. He had already made progress in uniting German territories by marrying the niece of the Duke of Bavaria, a move that bound the two most powerful families in the east together.

Charles Martel's eldest two children from his first marriage were also coming of age and were well-placed to continue any fight. In real life the younger son, Pippin III, proved such an effective campaigner and leader he was elected the first Frankish king of the Carolingian dynasty in 751 – paving the way for his son, Charlemagne, to revive the Western Empire. There potentially was a lot of fight left in the family.

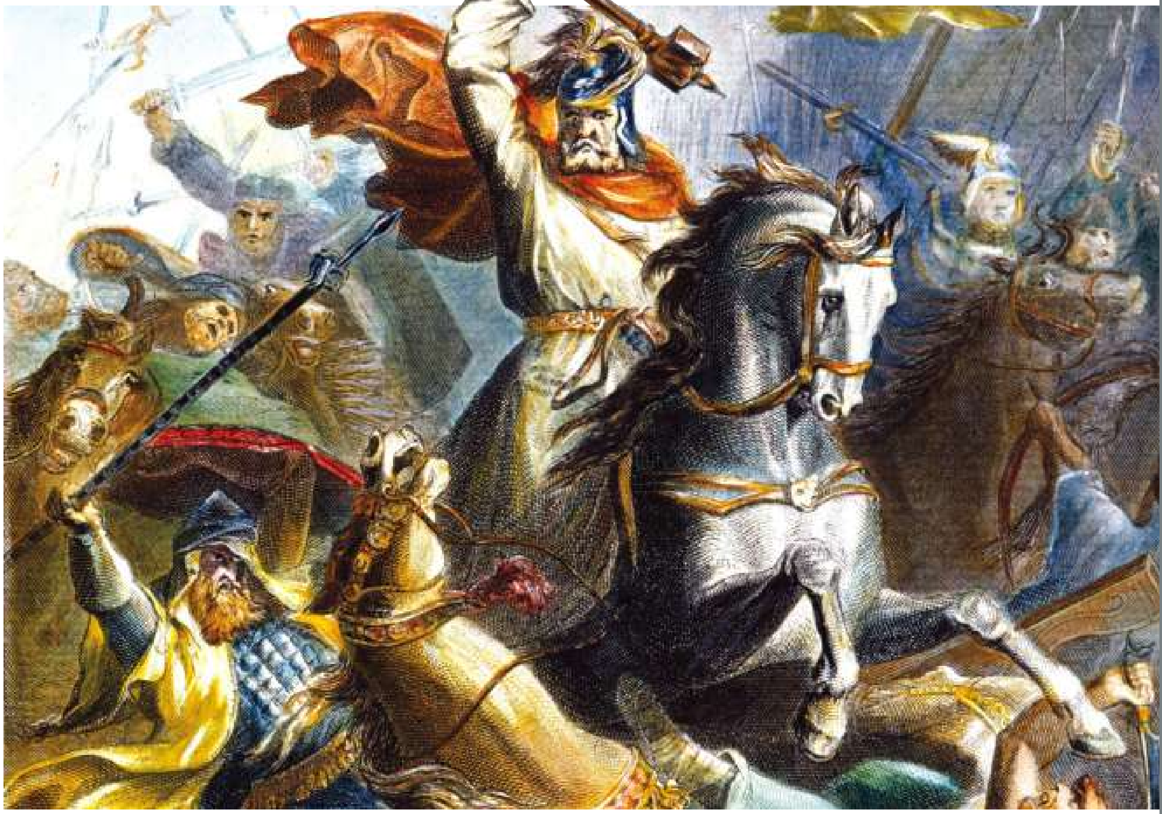
How might other European kingdoms respond and how might their political dynamic have changed?

The reputation of the Franks was long diminished after decades of in-fighting and uninspiring leadership. A similar situation in Spain had meant few neighbours followed affairs there – and most people thought the Arab conquest was probably the Visigoths' own fault. The fate of the Franks, too, would have been seen as a warning about weak and immoral action in the early years.

In Britain and Ireland, there was already a sense of religious superiority. That would only have grown. More English and Irish holy people would have headed to the continent in order to prop up Christianity and possibly to have agitated for non-cooperation with the Arabs. The Arabs would have been too stretched consolidating control of Spain and France to do much more than attempt occasional raids across the water. And if they did, they were about to face great competition: the First Viking Age was only one generation away.

All eyes would have been on the Byzantine Empire. Would they be able to lead some kind of fight back? The Siege of Constantinople in 717-18 had marked the end of a century of defeats and contraction. In practical terms, however,

BELOW Paris could have had its own version of the Alhambra Palace

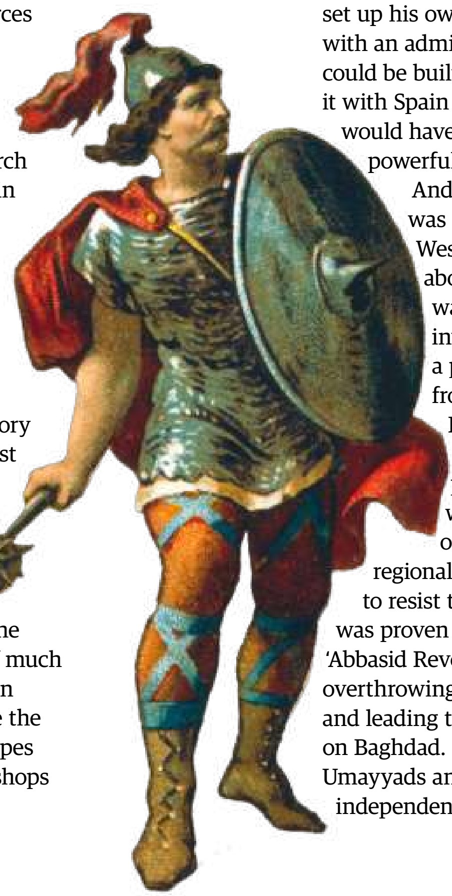


ABOVE A depiction of Charles Martel defeating the army of the caliph in 732

emperors could have done little more than they did in reality: forge alliances with groups across Eastern Europe and Italy.

What would be the impacts practically and reputationally for the Christian Church?
The Christian Church in 732 was deeply divided and inconsistent. Charles Martel's victory actually didn't help in the short term as he used ecclesiastical resources to reward his followers and support his army. A story circulated that, on his death, he was dragged into the pits of Hell by a dragon for his sins! Reformers complained that the Church was too full of noblemen indulging in sex, drinking and hunting. Muslim rule would have impoverished the churches and made it less attractive as an institution to abuse – but it would also have lost even more of its social authority in the process.

The effects on the papacy would have been dire. Charles Martel's victory ultimately enabled the popes to enlist the Franks to defend them from Lombard and Arab assaults. Without a strong patron, the city of Rome would have fallen to one or the other – and probably several times over. The papacy would have been stripped of much of its wealth. Without the Carolingian Empire, it would never have become the influential force it became either. Popes may have stayed little more than bishops of Rome.



BELOW Charles Martel ("the Hammer") would establish the Carolingian dynasty

Other than just land, what would be the valuable gains for the Caliphate by expanding into Frankish territory, and what could have been its potential ambitions?
The Frankish Kingdom was the strongest of the post-Roman territories. Conquering it would have been an impressive achievement. For 'Abd al-Rahman, this could have offered the opportunity to set up his own dynasty in a wealthy land with an administrative infrastructure that could be built up in time. To combine it with Spain and parts of North Africa would have meant he was a truly powerful figure.

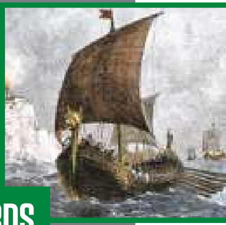
And in many respects, Tours was about 'Abd al-Rahman's Western ambitions rather than about the Umayyads. He was not under any orders to invade or raid. The attack was a punt. Córdoba was so far from the caliphal capital of Damascus that direct control was already an unrealistic proposition anyway. Paris would have been too. It was only a matter of time before regional governors would be able to resist the will of the centre. This was proven soon enough. In 747 the 'Abbasid Revolution began, ultimately overthrowing the Umayyads in the East, and leading to the caliphate recentring on Baghdad. Córdoba stayed loyal to the Umayyads and so effectively became independent of the 'Abbasid Caliphate.

THE POSSIBILITY

800 CE

A VIKING EUROPEAN EMPIRE?

Viking raids had already established a network of trade and influence across Europe, stretching from Ireland to Russia. With a real threat of Muslim expansion across France, and possibly further, Christendom could have become more fractured and plummet into crisis. While resources were focused on the perceived threat from the Arab Caliphate in the south, the Vikings could have seized the opportunity to make territorial gains from the north, expanding their trade, boosting their hordes of silver, and even setting down roots to establish legitimate political power.



1096 CE ONWARDS

CRUSADES CANCELLED

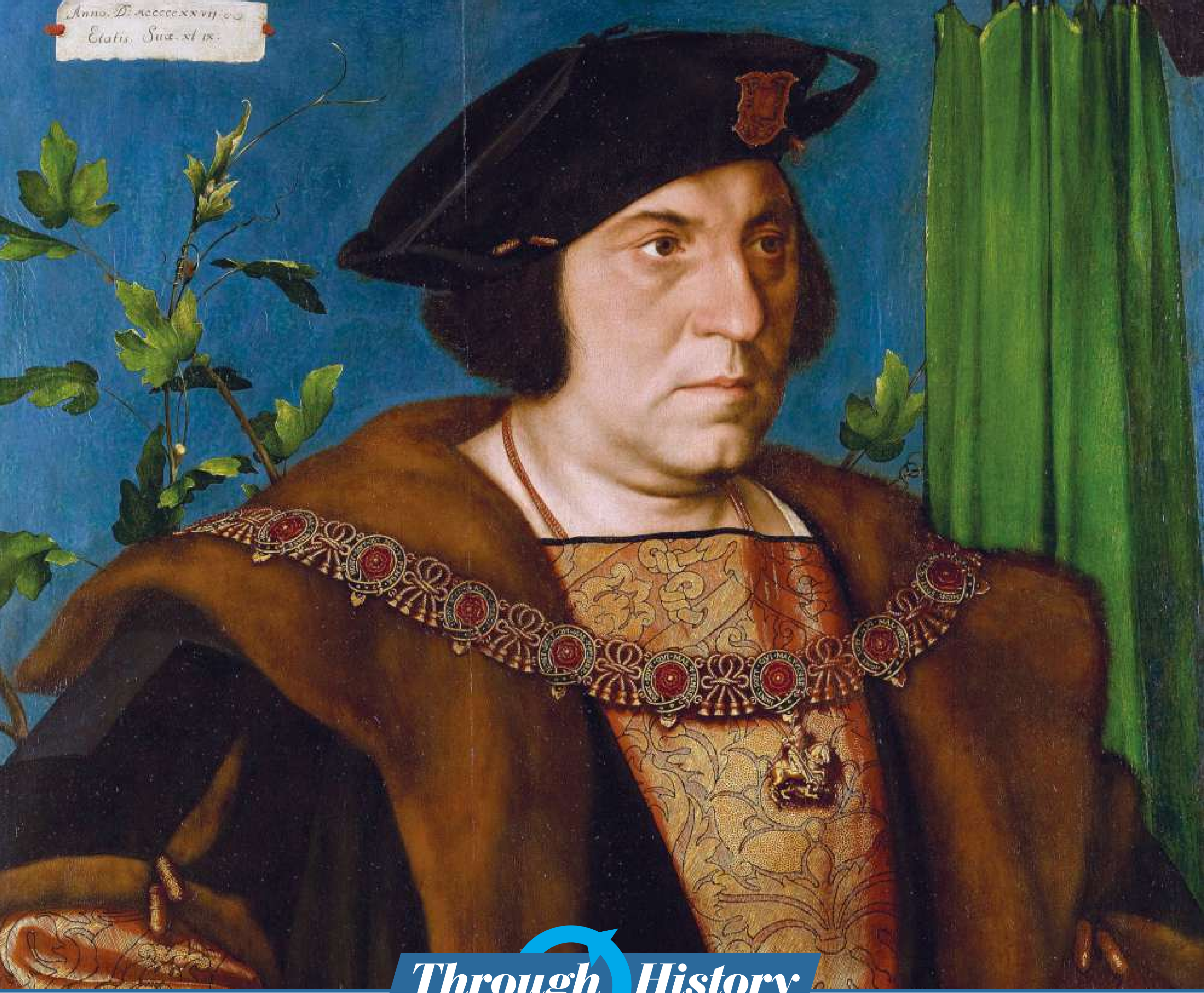
Should more of Europe had fallen under Arab influence, then any call to arms by the Christian church to attack the Holy Land may well have fallen on deaf ears. Not only could the influence of the papacy have been somewhat reduced by Muslim success, but to defeat Muslim forces in the East would be meaningless if you left your homeland open and vulnerable to the Arab forces in the West. Much of Western Europe may have become more closely integrated with North Africa and the Middle East and with it proven greater religious plurality, albeit at a price. Political and religious battle lines in medieval history would have been very different.

PRE 1400 CE

A LIGHT BULB MOMENT FOR EUROPE

With the spread of Islamic control and influence throughout Europe, there is the possibility that greater access to the writings and knowledge of Greek and Arab philosophy and scientific thought would have stimulated learning among European scholars. Centuries before the Renaissance of Da Vinci and Michelangelo, there could have been an acceleration in creative thought in the arts and architecture. European society could have seen advances in creative city planning, and mass-produced books potentially available much earlier through developments in printing.

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images



Through History

HOLBEIN AT THE TUDOR COURT

A new exhibition at Buckingham Palace celebrates the most famous portrait artist of the Tudor era

In 1526, a young German-Swiss painter named Hans Holbein the Younger arrived in England, and he was soon to make his mark on English history as the man who captured the appearances of some of the greatest figures from the early Tudor period. Having painted portraits of the prominent humanist scholar Desiderius Erasmus in his early career, Holbein was recommended by Erasmus to his friend, courtier Sir Thomas More, who welcomed him to England. Holbein began to paint subjects such as More and his circle of fellow scholars, gaining a reputation for his skilled portraiture.

Into the 1530s, Holbein became the most coveted portrait artist of the Tudor court and those he painted grew in prominence and status. He distanced himself from Thomas More's humanist sphere and instead found patrons in Sir Thomas Cromwell and the king's second wife Anne Boleyn. Holbein's subjects included Henry VIII himself, Henry's children Mary and Edward, and Henry's wives Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour and Anne of Cleves. Now, a new exhibition of paintings from the Royal Collection highlights Holbein as a master of his craft, showcasing his process and celebrating his artistic skill and legacy.

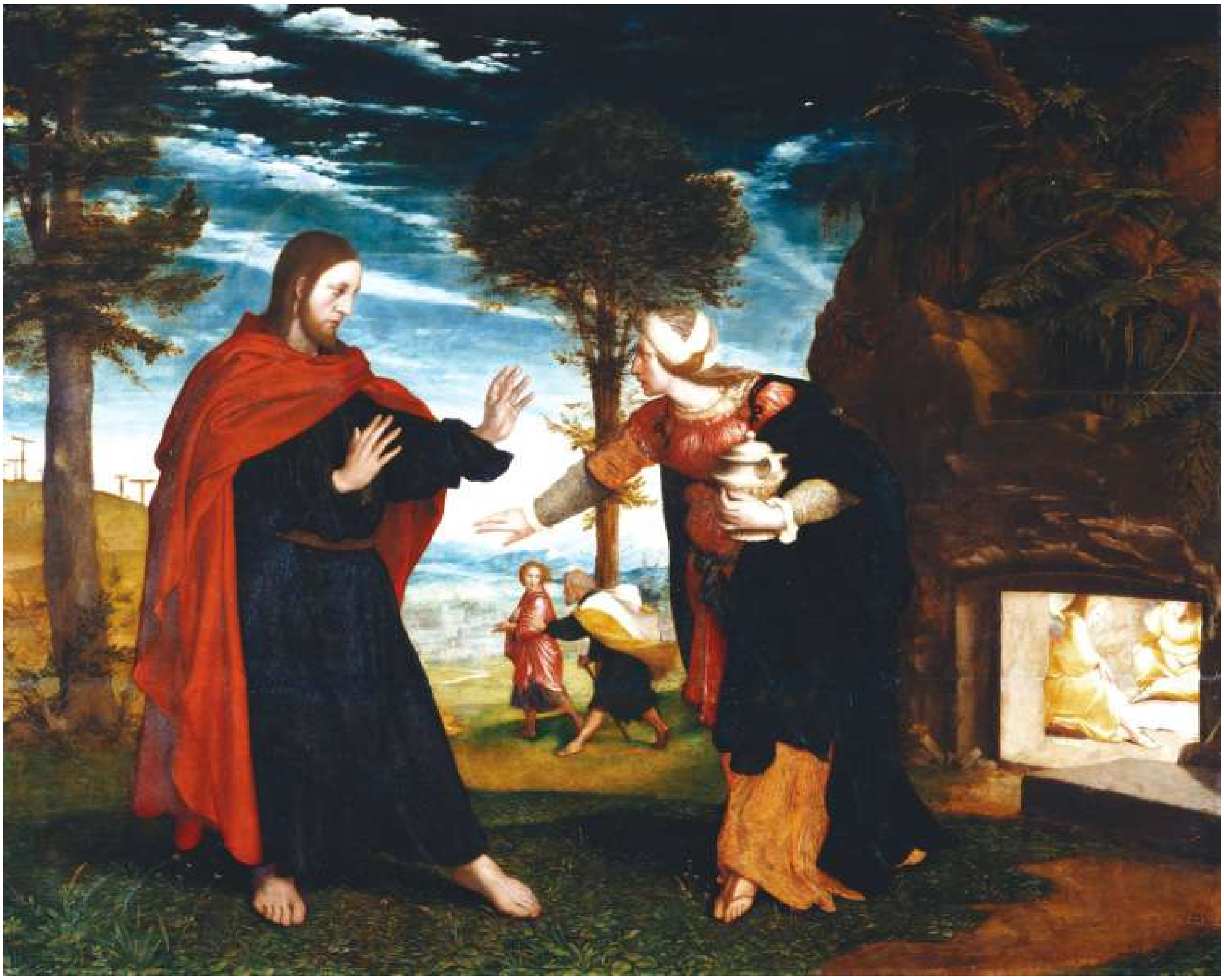
All images: ©Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2023

SIR HENRY GUILDFORD

◀ Sir Henry Guildford was one of Henry VIII's closest friends, and was painted by Holbein in one of his most spectacular portraits. To achieve the opulent gold colour of Guildford's clothing, Holbein used a combination of gold leaf and shell-gold paint.

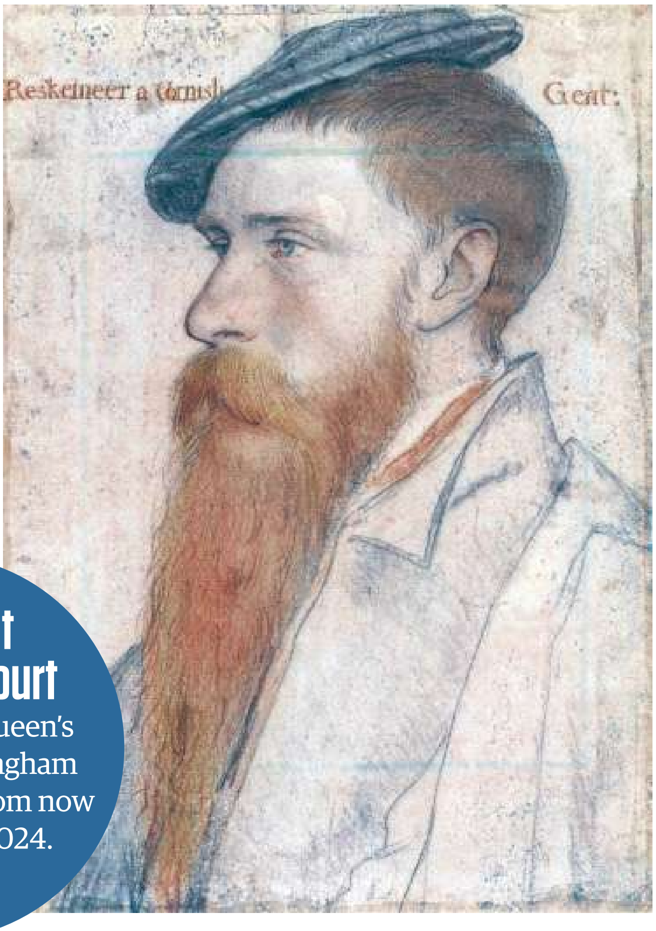
NOLI ME TANGERE

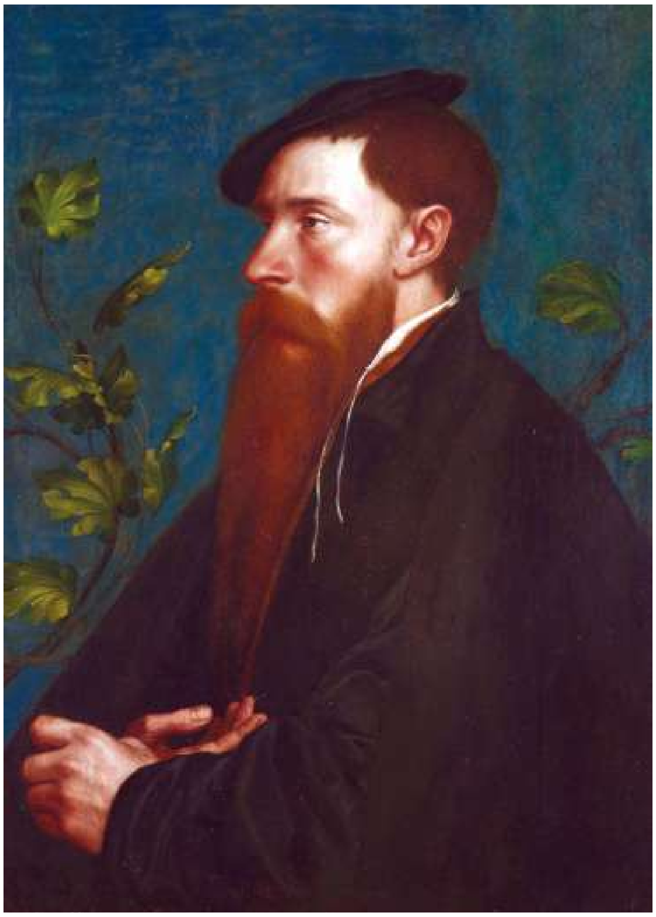
▶ Painted during his first years in England, this Holbein piece shows the moment Mary Magdalene discovered Christ had risen from his tomb. Though Holbein completed many religious paintings, this is the only example in the Royal Collection.



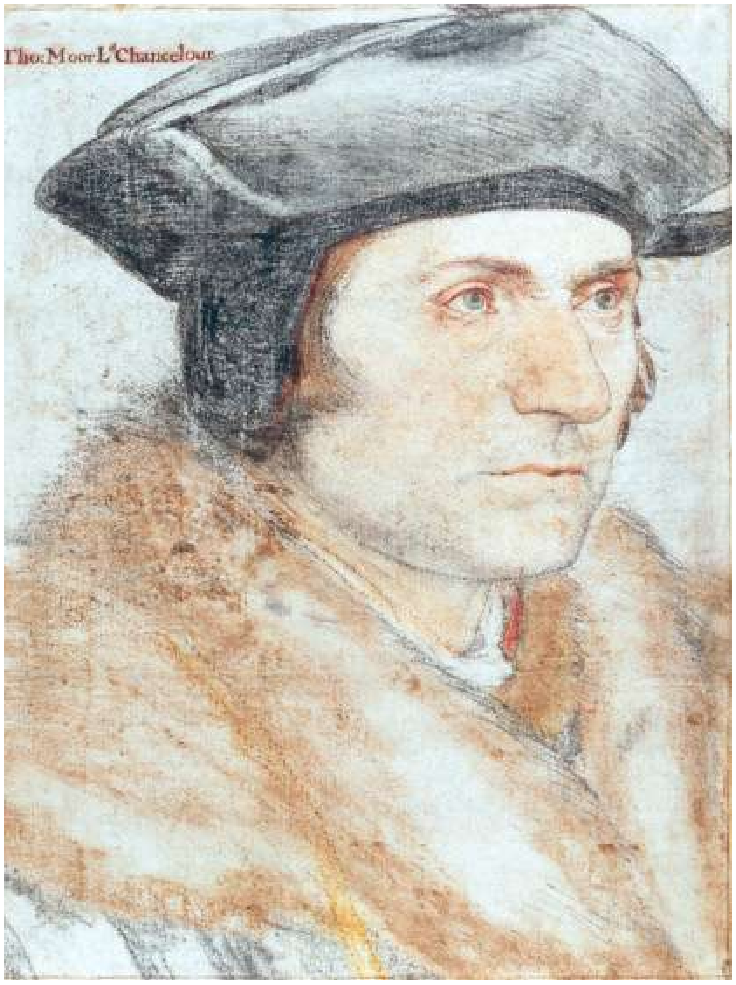
WILLIAM RESKIMER

▶ Both images of Page of the Chamber William Reskimer highlight Holbein's artistic process. These two portraits show how closely Holbein remained to his preparatory drawings when proceeding to paint his subjects, only changing slight contouring on Reskimer's ear in the final version.



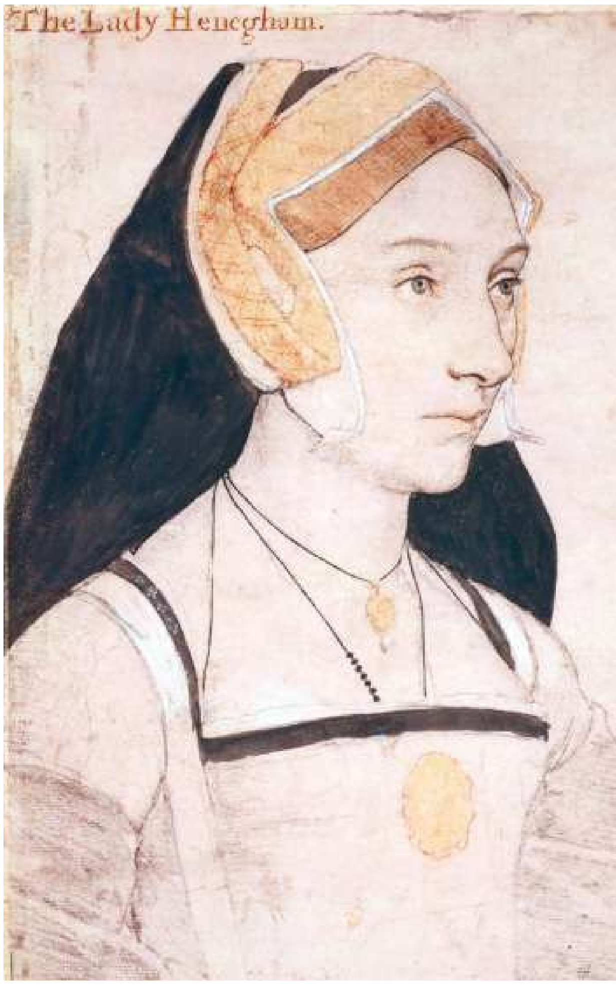


Holbein at the Tudor Court is open at The Queen's Gallery of Buckingham Palace, London from now until 14 April 2024.



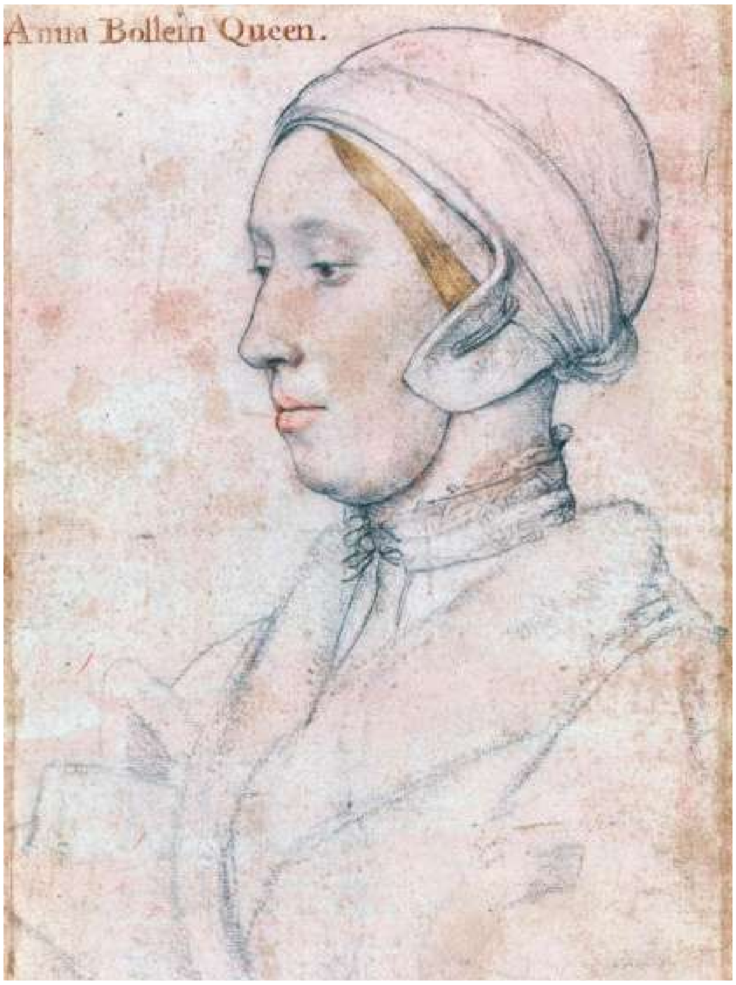
SIR THOMAS MORE

This study of Sir Thomas More may have been undertaken by Holbein in preparation for his famous painted individual portrait of More, or for the portrait he also completed of More's family. Holbein possibly lodged with Thomas More when he first arrived in England.


The Lady Henegham.

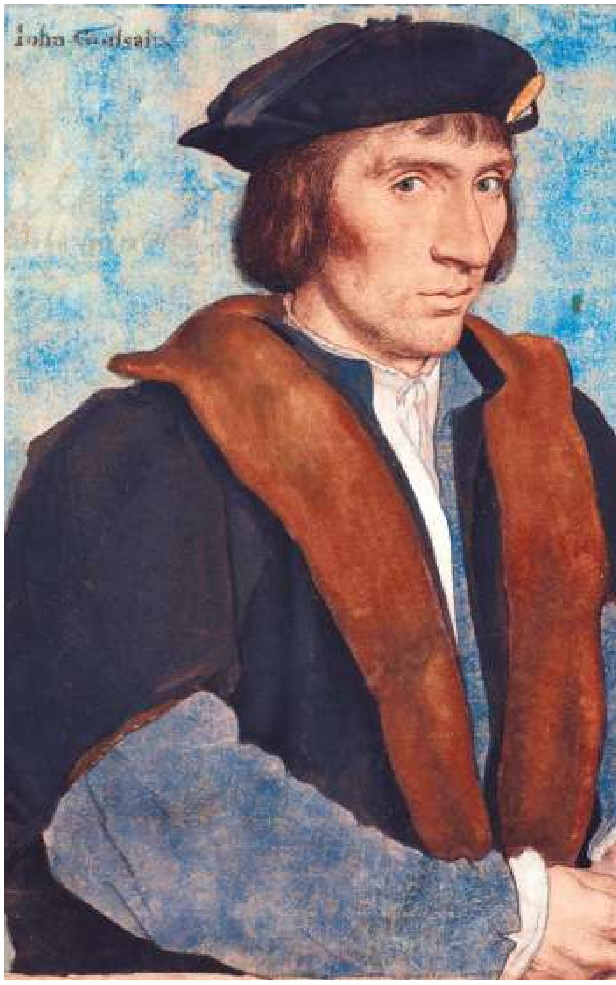
MARY SHELTON

Mary Shelton was a cousin of Anne Boleyn and later became Lady Heveningham. She was a writer and poet and was part of the literary community at the Tudor court. It is believed this drawing of her was undertaken towards the end of Holbein's career.


Anna Bollein Queen.

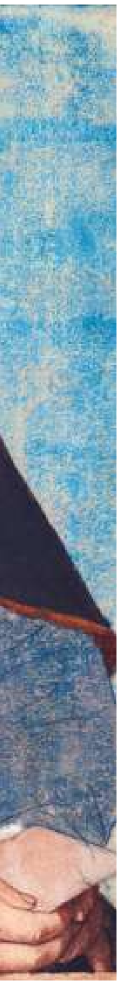
ANNE BOLEYN

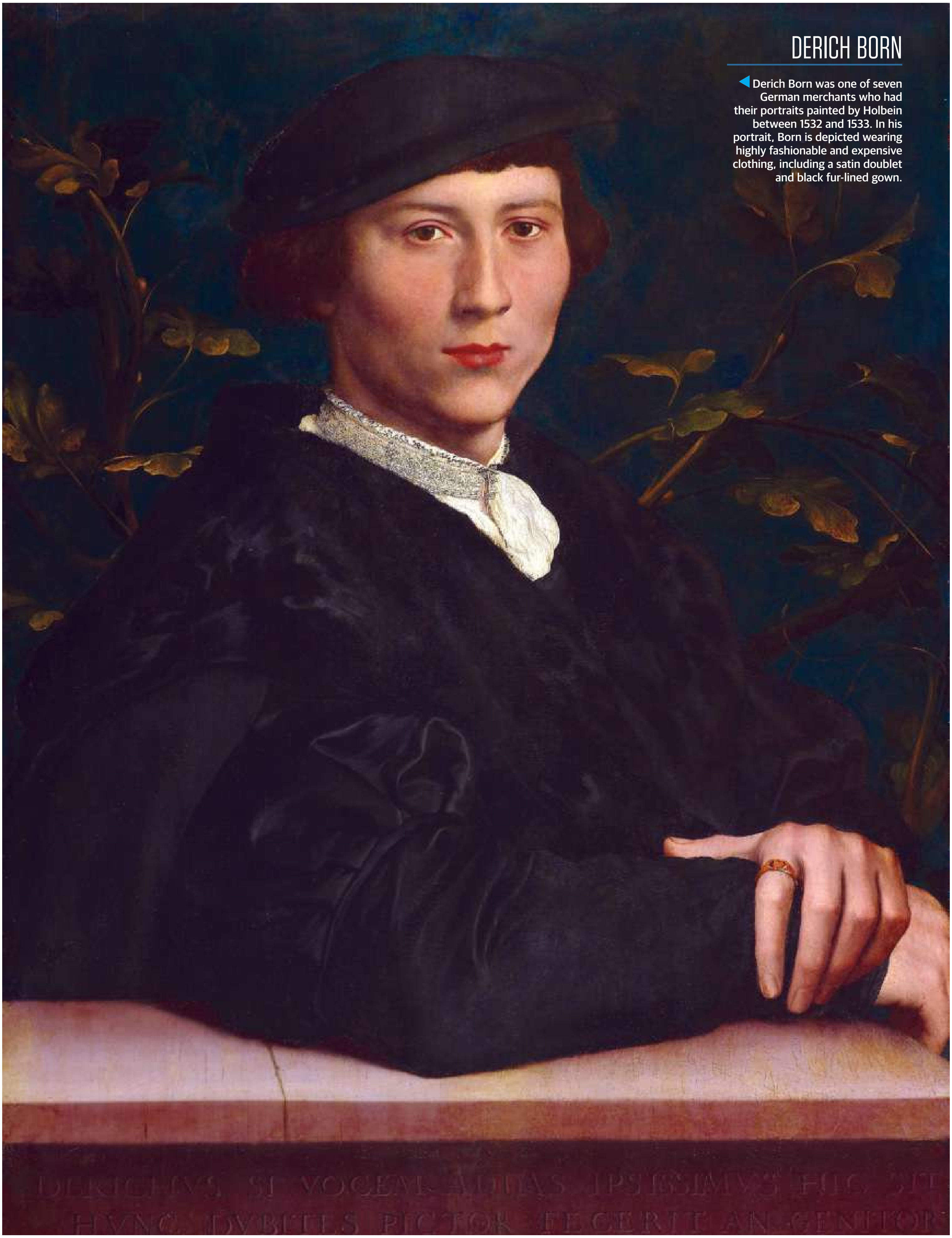
Although it is not certain, this drawing has long been believed to depict Henry VIII's second wife Anne Boleyn. She is shown to be wearing a linen undercap and a fur-lined nightgown which may have been given to her by the king.



SIR JOHN GODSALVE

Many of the unfinished works in the Royal Collection at Windsor were part of Holbein's personal collection at the time of his death. This incomplete portrait of Sir John Godsalve was therefore likely still in Holbein's possession when he died in 1543.



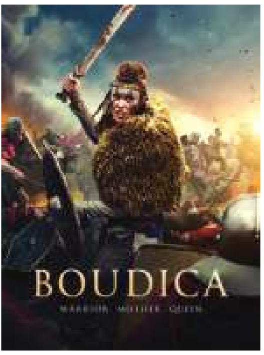

DERICHVS SI VOCEM ADDAS IPSISSIMVS HIC SIT
HVNC DVBITES PICTOR FECERIT AN GENITOR

DERICH BORN

◀ Derich Born was one of seven German merchants who had their portraits painted by Holbein between 1532 and 1533. In his portrait, Born is depicted wearing highly fashionable and expensive clothing, including a satin doublet and black fur-lined gown.

REVIEWS

The books, TV shows and films causing a stir in the history world this month



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BOUDICA

An admirable but flawed stab at honouring a national legend

Cert: 15 **Director:** Jesse V Johnson **Cast:** Olga Kurylenko, Clive Standen, Lucy Martin **Released:** Out now

The story of Boudica, the Iceni royal who led a failed rebellion against the Romans circa 61 CE, is an enticing one for filmmakers. She was a female leader on the battlefield and it ended in defeat and tragedy. Her wheeling around on a horse and chariot, burning down Roman forts and towns, provides much cinematic spectacle, too.

Roman scholars set down accounts of the uprising decades later, but it was in the Victorian era where her legend was revived, as a nationalist symbol, and as a romanticised figure – the warrior queen – inspiring poetry and painting. Jesse V Johnson's biopic follows such artistic traditions and updates the story of Boudica with a *Braveheart* (1995) makeover for modern audiences.

What *Boudica* (2023) doesn't have is a *Braveheart*-sized budget, nor a Ridley Scott type visionary grandeur. Its financial limitations are found in the constant favouring of medium and close-up shots, mundane Suffolk locations – lots of indistinct woodland and fields – and CGI. While not too bad, you still can't quite shake the feeling Johnson's film is severely restricted from delivering anything close to a definitive Boudica movie that her legend deserves.

What the production does have is Olga Kurylenko. The Ukrainian-French actress is cleverly used by Johnson in the manner of an Old Hollywood type star; specifically the exotic films Josef von Sternberg made with Marlene Dietrich in the early 1930s. From a soundstage, he crafted far-flung adventures and melodramas, with Dietrich turned into an art object. She got to play Mata Hari (*Dishonored*, 1931) and Catherine the Great (*The Scarlet Empress*, 1934) and looked fabulous while doing so. Another touchstone of influence appears to be exploitation cinema's nasty rape-revenge cycle of movies, where a brutalised woman enacts gory vengeance against her enemies. Johnson managed to find a way to overcome budgetary obstacles by casting a captivating lead and using a narrative arc of pulp fiction dressed up in historical garb.

Kurylenko at first is depicted as the glamorous and happy consort to King Prasutagus (Clive Standen) and doting mother to her children. Then, the evil Romans turn up, kill everybody she loves, leaving Boudica as the head of a collective group of Celts who rise up against colonial oppressors and lay siege to Colchester, St. Albans, and London. This part is at least historically accurate, but the film doesn't have the money to stage large-scale rumbles with thousands of men and its these sequences that suffer, Johnson typically resorting to lots of blood-spray shots and smoke machines in an attempt to disguise the fact there's about 20 people on set.

If Johnson (also the screenwriter) takes liberties with history and Boudica's mythology, including clumsily injecting elements of mysticism into the plot, Kurylenko ensures the film is always watchable and her transformation from wearing fancy, long, brightly coloured dresses to gore-soaked muddy tunics, war paint and matted hair is visually striking. Her spirited performance anchors occasionally ropey material; enough to forgive its failings in other areas and make *Boudica* just about worthwhile viewing. Just about. ***MC***

★★☆☆☆

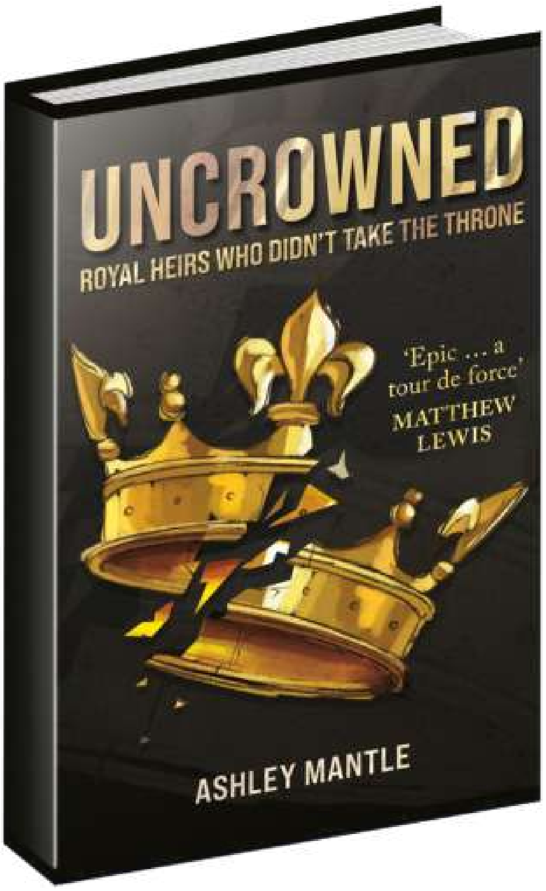
Book Film TV Podcast Games Other

Reviews by
Martyn Conterio, Catherine Curzon, Jonathan Gordon

UNCROWNED: ROYAL HEIRS WHO DIDN'T TAKE THE THRONE

A readable history of some right-royal also-rans!

Author: Ashley Mantle **Publisher:** Amberley **Price:** £22.99 **Released:** Out now

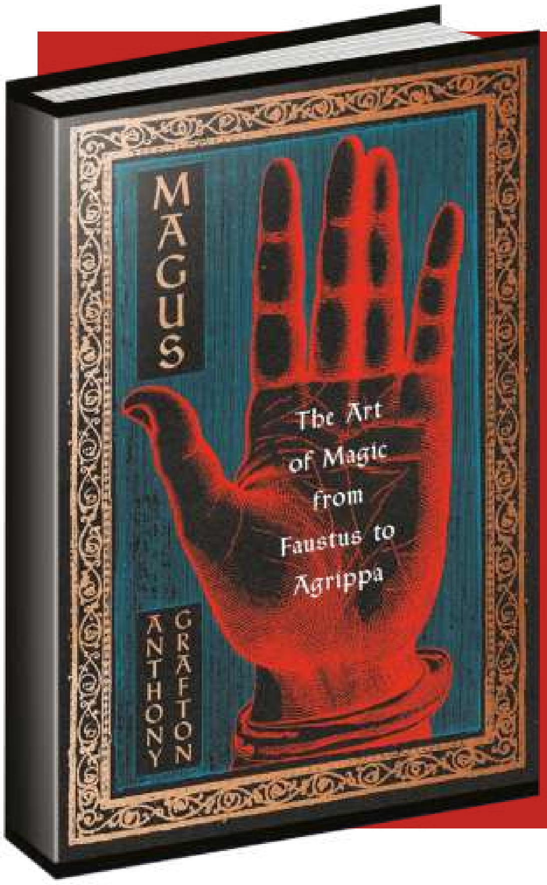

UNCROWNED
ROYAL HEIRS WHO DIDN'T TAKE THE THRONE
'Epic ... a tour de force'
MATTHEW LEWIS
ASHLEY MANTLE

Since history was written, succession to the throne of England has been determined by blood, with heirs prepared to rule from the very second of their birth. Yet not all of those who believed themselves destined to wear the Crown were able to realise their fate. In *Uncrowned: Royal Heirs Who Didn't Take The Throne*, Ashley Mantle pulls back the curtain of history on those heirs who never achieved their birthright. From mysterious disappearances to quirks of fate, untimely deaths and everything in between, readers will meet some familiar and some not so familiar figures along the way.

Uncrowned: Royal Heirs Who Didn't Take The Throne takes readers on a journey through the history of England, beginning with Robert II, Duke of Normandy, and ending with Frederick, Duke of York and Albany. Along the way it takes in the Princes in the Tower, Lady Jane Grey, Mary, Queen of Scots, and many more besides. Each individual character is given their own chapter and, in their way, a chance to command the spotlight as Mantle provides necessarily short but comprehensive biographies, examining their life and times and the reason - sometimes complex, sometimes less so - that they are among the ranks of the uncrowned monarchs.

This entertaining and intriguing book is very accessible and should appeal to a casual reader of history who is looking to find out more about this particular category of royals. They are guaranteed to find something to capture their attention. ***CC***

★★★★☆



MAGUS: THE ART OF MAGIC FROM FAUSTUS TO AGRIPPA

A fascinating journey through the history of Renaissance magic

Author: Anthony Grafton **Publisher:** Penguin **Price:** £30
Released: 4 January 2024

In *Magus: The Art Of Magic From Faustus To Agrippa*, Anthony Grafton weaves a fascinating study of the remarkable - for all sorts of reasons - men who were celebrated as magi during the Renaissance. Scientists, dreamers, scholars and sometimes just plain old frauds, these figures enjoyed immense influence and access as they moved in the highest circles and left people reeling.

Grafton's book is one that will grab you from the off and capture your imagination with its larger-than-life characters and tall, but true, tales. It is not just a collection of fantastical stories though, but a study of magic in early modern Europe, told through the sometimes controversial figures who practised it, expertly placed in the context of their times. Magus is a powerful new history of the Renaissance, expertly told through some of its most venerated or questionable figures.

Magus: The Art Of Magic From Faustus To Agrippa deserves to find a wide readership and, at a time when humankind is still seeking to understand some of the mysteries of the universe, it feels timely. With its cast of necromancers, frauds, magicians and engineers, every page feels packed with incident and drama. It is an authoritative but witty book that brings some of the most colourful characters of the Renaissance blazing back into life, evoking a world in which it seemed as though anything could happen. This book will appeal to a broad range of readers, who will be well rewarded. ***CC***

★★★★★

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HISTORY OF WAR RECOMMENDS…

Out now!

Cashing Out

Author Neill Lochery **Price** £25 **Publisher** Public Affairs

This new book by historian Neill Lochery seeks to expose the governments that also profited from the Nazi regime's ill-gotten gains. Lochery starts by explaining that a fifth of Europe's art and treasure was seized by the Nazis during the Second World War. It's a staggering fact that sets up a staggering tale of pay offs and trades that bought aid and neutrality. Cashing Out is a fascinating, often indignant, read that sheds fresh light on arguably the greatest act of larceny in human history.

THE SILK ROADS

A gorgeous new rendering of a thought-provoking reexamination of history

Author: Peter Frankopan **Publisher:** The Folio Society **Price:** £150 **Released:** Out now

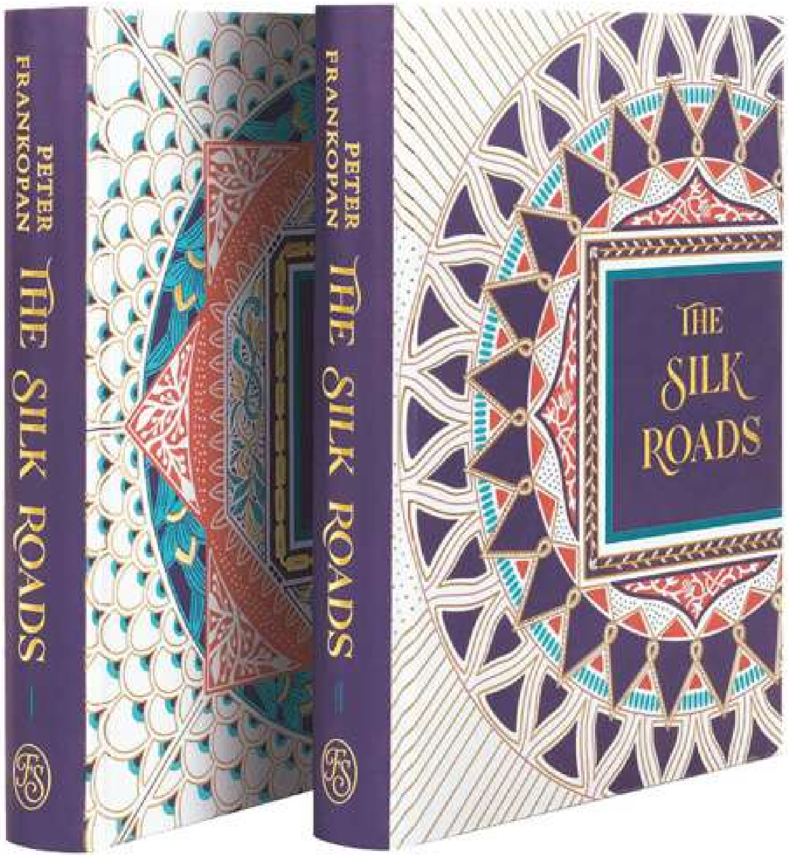
As Peter Frankopan lays out well in his new introduction to his book, *The Silk Roads* proved to be very successful upon its initial release in 2015, but it was a success that took him by surprise. As he explains, he intended the book as a corrective text, repositioning the lens of history away from Western Europe and onto the hub of the Silk Roads. He made the argument that it was here, in the vast region between the Black Sea and the Himalayas, that the true 'cradle of civilisation' could be found.

It was a compelling and thought-provoking argument then and it remains one today. He explains the concept of the Silk Roads very well, not as physical structures but more as common paths of information and people that lasted for centuries. From cloth to religion, the Silk Roads (a relatively modern term for the concept) proved to be a lasting conduit for enriching the nations it touched financially, intellectually and spiritually.

The ultimate aim of Frankopan's book is to make the argument that the centre of world history belongs in this region, not in Europe as many histories of the world tend to assume or intimate. It's an ambitious aim and the degree to which you find it successful may depend on what elements of history you think have been overplayed or given short shrift by the author. For our part, the focused mission itself is worthy of consideration, hopefully leading to further investigation and reading on your own part.

The correction Frankopan was attempting to make was the common assumed through-line of 'civilised' culture that begins with the Egyptians and runs through the Greeks, Romans, Christendom in Europe and eventually to America. This pathway, whether consciously or not, has dominated historical and political thinking for many decades, if not centuries. Frankopan begins his book with Mesopotamia, the 'Fertile Crescent' that saw the birth of systemised farming techniques and the first written laws of Hammurabi.

He also points to the fact that when Alexander the Great looked to expand his empire, he did not set his sights west to the European continent, but east to India. The riches, both material and intellectual, of the east were well known to the ancients. That Christianity took hold first in the Silk Road regions before it gained traction elsewhere, competing side by side with Judaism, Buddhism and more in a melting pot of spiritual ideas, is another example of the importance of this region.



Frankopan paints a picture through a new two-volume edition of the book of an area through which history has flowed frequently. Whether it was the Greeks, Mongols, traders, invaders or disease, this was the crossroads of the world. It's a potent line of thinking, given a gorgeous new presentation through this Folio edition. 64 stunning images break up the text along with nine maps that help place all of these ideas geographically. For anyone who has grown up largely consuming a western view of history and the world, this book can be an eye-opening read. ***JG***

★★★★☆

HISTORY VS HOLLYWOOD

Fact versus fiction on the silver screen

AMADEUS

Director: Milos Forman **Starring:** F Murray Abraham, Tom Hulce, Elizabeth Berridge **Country:** Czechia **Year:** 1984

An exuberant celebration of genius, but not necessarily of historical fact

D

VERDICT: Plays fast and loose with the facts, but captures the creative majesty of the music.

01 In the film, Italian composer Antonio Salieri (Abraham) confesses to the murder of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Hulce). This idea originated from a play by Alexander Pushkin that made the accusation five years after Salieri died, but there is no evidence it's true.

02 Mozart is depicted as childish, foul-mouthed and crude with an annoying laugh. This might be true. Based on his letters to family and friends, he often expressed a crude sense of humour and others wrote his laugh was frequently loud and aggravating.

03 We see a child Mozart being taken around the powerful courts and palaces of Europe as a prodigy by his father. This really happened, although the ages Salieri gives are a little off. He had him writing a concerto aged four, but it was more likely aged 11.

04 The film claims Salieri made a vow of chastity as a bargain with God for his talent. In reality, he was married with several children. He was also much more successful as a composer and teacher than the film suggests, with Beethoven being one of his students.

05 A dying Mozart is commissioned to write a requiem by a masked stranger. The anonymous commission is real, but it was from Count Franz von Walsegg, not a disguised Salieri, and it was finished by Mozart's student Franz Xaver Süssmayr.

All images: © Alamy

Did you know?

Purportedly, sugar plums traditionally contained a small wire so they could be hung on the Christmas tree.

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Ingredients

- 3 cups of walnuts
- 1 cup of hazelnuts
- ⅔ cup of cranberries
- ⅔ cup of dates
- 2 tablespoons of apricot or cranberry preserve
- ¼ teaspoon of cinnamon
- ⅙ teaspoon of cloves
- ⅔ cup of brown or granulated sugar

Main image: © Alamy
Inset image: © Getty Images

'VICTORIAN' SUGAR PLUMS

A SUGARY, CHRISTMASSY SWEET WITH A MYSTERIOUS PAST, BRITAIN, 19TH CENTURY - PRESENT

Not just the name of the fairy in Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* suite, sugar plums have a surprisingly rich and convoluted history. Although recipes for plums coated in sugar can be found from before Victorian times (for example, the 1602 cookbook, *Delights For Ladies* states that this is the best way to preserve fruit), the term would have meant something much different than today. According to numerous sources, 'sugar plum' would have more accurately described comfits, essentially hard, sugar-coated sweets. This version of sugar plum can often be found online, and according to *TIME* magazine may actually have had their origins in Mimi Sheraton's 1968 cookbook, *Visions Of Sugarplums*.

METHOD

01 Lightly toast the walnuts and hazelnuts in a little unsalted butter, over a medium heat in a frying pan for roughly five minutes. Do not burn.

02 Once cool, roughly chop the walnuts, hazelnuts, cranberries and dates. Place in a food processor and roughly blend – do not blend fully. However, if you do not have a food processor, chop slightly smaller and be sure to mix well.

03 Add the preserve, cloves and cinnamon. Stir and mix together. They should begin to form into a workable paste.

04 Once the paste is ready. Roll the mixture into small balls. The size can be dependent on how many sugar plums you wish to make.

05 Place the sugar in a bowl and coat each sugar plum liberally with it.

06 Sugar plums can either be eaten directly or stored in the refrigerator for two weeks.

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